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OF NORTH OSTABLE

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FAIR HARBOR
GALUSHA THE MAGNIFICENT
THE PORTYGEE
"SHAVINGS"
MARY-'GUSTA
CAP'N DAN'S DAUGHTER
THE RISE OF ROSCOE PAINE
THE POSTMASTER
THE WOMAN HATERS
KEZIAH COFFIN
CY WHITTAKER'S PLACE
CAP'N ERI
EXTRICATING OBADIAH
THANKFUL'S INHERITANCE
MR. PRATT
MR. PRATT'S PATIENTS
KENT KNOWLES: "QUAHAUG"
CAP'N WARREN'S WARDS
THE DEPOT MASTER
OUR VILLAGE
PARTNERS OF THE TIDE
THE OLD HOME HOUSE
CAPE COD BALLADS

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A NOVEL

BY

JOSEPH C. LINCOLN

AUTHOR OF "FAIR HARBOR," "GALUSHA THE MAGNIFICENT,"
"SHAVINGS," "MARY-'GUSTA," ETC.

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OF NORTH OSTABLE

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CHAPTER I

IT was a day in the first week of April and there was excitement in North Ostable.

This statement is given a paragraph all to itself and it deserves it. To find excitement in North Ostable at any time, even in the height of the summer rush, would be worthy of remark; but to find it there in the early spring, long before the hotels and boarding houses in Ostable and Denboro and Wapatomac and Orham are opened; when the summer cottages have been locked and shuttered all winter and will remain so for two more months at least; when the main highway up and down the Cape bears no burden of tourist traffic and the railroad still operates but two trains each way daily; when the people living in Ostable County are those who really live there, instead of those who merely come there—to find excitement, however mild, in North Ostable then is as remarkable as finding a two-pound trout in a rain barrel, or a live mouse in a cattery, or a fifty-dollar bill on the floor of a poorhouse; that is to say, so rare and extraordinary as to be almost impossible.

Nevertheless, the fact remains that there was excitement in North Ostable on this particular day of this particular first week in April.

Miss Althea Bemis was the first resident to experience the unwonted and unseasonable thrill. Miss Althea was having a troubled morning. She lived alone—a solitude imposed by Fate and distinctly not of her own choosing—in a little story-and-a-half cottage upon the sandy byway which the natives had called the "Salt Crick road" until some summer resident rechristened it Bayberry Lane. The front door of the Bemis house faced the Lane and from the windows of Miss Althea's front parlor one might—although few did—look out across the little front yard and the rutted road to the old-fashioned, gray-shingled, weather-beaten, tumble-down group of house and barn and outbuildings which once belonged to old Captain Sam Dillingham, the same Captain Sam who lived to be eighty-nine years of age and then bought himself an automobile and married his thirty-five-year-old housekeeper. Fourteen months after making this spectacle—or pair of spectacles—of himself, the Captain was carried to the graveyard, and his widow, having sold the old house and everything else she did not care for belonging to her late husband, rode away from North Ostable in the automobile and never returned.

Since then the Dillingham property had changed hands three times and tenants oftener still. Its present owner was Cyrenus Stone. Its most recent tenants were a Portuguese family, fourteen in number. They, having failed to come to time with the rent, were dispossessed by Cyrenus and evicted by the constable. Miss Althea was a witness—ocular and auricular—of the eviction and attended prayer meeting every Friday night for the following month. She confided to a friend that she *hoped* she might be helped to forget some of the names those Porty-

gees called the constable *some time,* but she had her doubts. Since the eviction the Dillingham place had stood empty, its grass uncut, its shutters closed, its shingles blowing loose and falling to the ground. Cyrenus Stone lost his temper when people mentioned it to him. They called it his white elephant and cited its purchase as the one instance where his usually cautious business foot had slipped.

And now, on this April morning, without a word of warning, without the slightest bit of preliminary gossip, the blinds of the Dillingham house were thrown back, the doors were opened, hammering was heard, a man with armfuls of firewood came and went from and to the barn, smoke was issuing from the kitchen chimney, a woman bearing a bucket and a broom appeared and reappeared by the side door. It was obvious, perfectly obvious, that the Dillingham house was being opened, cleaned and, to a certain extent at least, rendered habitable. But for whom? That was the question.

If you think that Althea Bemis, having asked herself that question, did not take immediate steps to answer it, then it is certain that you do not know Althea. Even in the midst of her own spring housecleaning she found time to look out of the window and, having noticed the amazing and most unexpected activity across the road, started forthwith to investigate. The man with the firewood she recognized at once as Henry Ward Beecher Payson. Henry was easy to recognize because he was the only one-legged man in Ostable township. Perhaps three-legged man would be better, because, besides the flesh-and-blood limb left to him after the railway accident, he owned a cork leg and a wooden stump, wearing sometimes one and

sometimes the other, according to caprice. Asked why he did not use the cork leg continuously, he was likely to reply, if he felt like replying, that he got tired of hearing the everlasting thing squeak. If he did not feel like replying he merely grunted. Henry Ward Beecher Payson was a "character," and a great many Ostable people—among them Miss Bemis—would have unhesitatingly named the kind of character he was.

The woman with the bucket and broom Althea recognized as Marietta Lamb, called "Mary's lamb" by the frivolous. It was to her that Miss Bemis, hastening across the road and into the Dillingham yard, applied for information. Marietta was always willing to talk, particularly if talking furnished an excuse to stop work. She stopped now and talked, but she did not furnish the desired information.

"Mornin', Althy," said Marietta. "I guessed likely you'd be over pretty soon. I see your front window shades goin' up. Some surprised to see this house open, wasn't you? . . . Um-hum. Well, I don't wonder. I'm considerable surprised, myself."

"But who is it bein' opened for?" queried Miss Althea, breathlessly. Marietta sniffed.

"Don't ask *me,*" she said, scornfully. "*I* can't tell you."

"You can't? Don't you know?"

Marietta sniffed again. "All I know is that I'm here a-workin'," she declared. "Cleanin' and scrubbin' and gettin' this old rats' nest fit for human bein's to live in. And I can *guess* that human bein's are goin' to live in it. Who they be or what's their names or why they're comin'

I don't know no more 'n a child unborn." She paused and then added spitefully, "If that."

"But——"

"Henry Payson hired me," went on Miss Lamb. "He come to me yesterday and asked me if I wanted a job. 'Job of what?' says I. 'Job of work,' says he. 'Where?' says I. 'Down to the old Dillin'ham place,' says he. 'For the land sakes,' says I, 'what for?' 'For two and a half a day,' says he. Well, I come this mornin' and here I be. I'm workin' on account of my willin'ness to help and my wages. But who I'm workin' *for* I don't know no more'n a child un—well, no more'n nothin'."

"But Henry Payson must know. Haven't you asked him?"

"*Asked* him!" Marietta's indignation overcame her. "Do you cal'late I'm a—a don't-know-what? Don't you suppose likely I've got *any* natural feelin's? I'll bet I've asked him a couple of million questions and all he does is grunt. Might's well talk to a pig. Now I'm through. I'm *through!*"

"Marietta," drawled a masculine voice behind them. Both ladies turned, to see Mr. Payson himself standing in the doorway. He was wearing his working rig—that is, his sweater, overalls, and wooden leg, and had a hatchet in his hand. His countenance expressed complete tranquillity. So, too, did his voice.

Miss Lamb regarded him with spiteful impatience.

"Well, what is it?" she snapped.

"Good mornin', Althy," observed Mr. Payson, stepping out into the yard. "Oh—er—Marietta——"

"Well, what *is* it?"

"That kittle of hot water you left on the stove——"

"Well, what about it?"

"It's bilin'——"

"Well, let it bile."

"Over."

A cloud of steam drifted through the doorway to prove his statement. Marietta fled to the rescue, uttering sounds expressive of agitation and temper. Henry Payson moved toward the barn. Miss Bemis followed.

"Oh—er—Henry," she called.

He did not stop to answer; instead he answered without stopping.

"Um-hum," he grunted.

He was still moving, so Althea hurried after him. The following dialogue was spoken during the progress to the barn, Payson stumping steadily on and little Miss Bemis trotting behind him.

"Oh—er—Henry——"

"Um-hum."

"Henry, are you fixin' this house up for somebody?"

"Um-hum."

"You *are?* Do you know who it is?"

"Um-hum."

"You do! Well, I declare! And I'd never heard a word! And I don't believe anybody else in town has either. Who is it?"

"Who's who?"

"Why—oh, *wait* a minute, can't you! I'm interested. Who are you cleanin' and fixin' up for?"

Henry was at the barn door by this time, the little door leading to the tool house. His wooden stump was on the threshold.

"Cyrenus," he said, and hoisted the rest of him up to

the level of the stump. He was about to close the door, but Althea seized its edge.

"Henry Payson," she snapped, "don't be so provokin'! I want to know who this house is bein' got ready for. I don't doubt Cyrenus Stone was the one that hired you and Marietta to do the work, but he ain't goin' to live here himself, is he?"

"Guess not."

"I guess not, too. He's got a home of his own and enough sight better one than this old thing. He's let it to somebody, of course. Now who is it? Ever since that last dreadful bunch of Portygees was in here I've been scared to death that another tribe like them might get it. I shan't sleep a wink nights till I know who my next-door neighbors are goin' to be. Do you know who's comin' to live in this house, Henry Payson?"

Henry's free hand, that not grasping the hatchet, moved upward and pulled slowly at one end of a scraggly, reddish-gray mustache. His eyes—faded, weather-beaten eyes behind steel-framed spectacles—regarded his questioner with about as much expression as that in the stare of what Miss Bemis would have called a "heathen image," meaning an idol. From beneath the mustache came speech, but in a minute instalment.

"Maybe," observed Mr. Payson.

It was a very small straw, but Althea grasped at it. "You *do?*" she cried. "Tell me who 'tis, Henry, won't you?"

"Can't," said Henry.

He was going into the tool house, but she still clung to the edge of the door.

"Oh, *please,*" she begged. "Can't you see why I'm so

anxious to know? I've got to live right next door to 'em, whoever they are. Tell me this much: what are they like? Are they—ah—Chinees or—ah—jailbirds or what? Tell me so much anyhow."

Henry Ward Beecher Payson looked down at her from the level of the toolhouse floor. Something seemed to amuse him. The corners of the scraggly mustache moved slightly upward, as if a grin might be hidden under the thatch.

"Well, Althy," he drawled, "they ain't—er—Chinees."

The toolhouse door was jerked from Miss Althea's fingers and closed tight. Something suspiciously like a chuckle sounded behind it. The owner of the fingers marched indignantly across the road and resumed her own interrupted housecleaning.

It was interrupted many times during the rest of that day and the next. So many distracting and intensely interesting things were happening across the road. A half load of boards and shingles and some cans of paint were delivered by the wagon from Bassett Brothers' lumber, hardware and housefitting store. Althea, of course, waylaid and questioned the driver of the wagon, but received no satisfaction. Henry Payson had ordered the lumber and paints and they were to be charged to Cyrenus Stone. Further than that the delivery boy knew naught concerning them, so Miss Bemis's questions merely served to arouse his own curiosity. A ton of coal was delivered. Henry Payson himself had ordered and paid for that. The coal bringer was questioned and departed to ask questions of other people. The group at the post office, awaiting the mail that evening, were surmising and questioning concerning the renovation of the Dillingham house, and

the following forenoon several of its members found occasion to saunter down Bayberry Lane and linger by the Bemis fence.

Mr. Shubal Bush was one of these lingerers. He was on his way—so he told Miss Bemis, who came out to join him—to see about a little job of work down to the hotel grounds. Shubal was usually to be found either going to work or coming from it; to find him at it was more unusual. He and Althea exchanged rumors.

"Did you hear what Cyrenus told Frankie-George down to the office last night?" asked Shubal. Miss Althea declared that she was sure she had not.

"Frank he put it right up to him," narrated Shubal. "Frank was there, same as he 'most generally is, and Cyrenus come in to get the mail. Frank sung out to him—he don't care for nothin' nor nobody, Frank don't—'Say, Cyrenus,' says he, 'what's this I hear about your rentin' that old Dillin'ham shack of yours?' he says. Cyrenus grinned. 'Was you surprised?' he wanted to know. 'You bet!' says Frank. 'You'll be more surprised by and by,' says Cyrenus. And that's all we got out of *him*. What did he mean by that, I want to know. Have you heard anything new this mornin', Althy?"

She had not, nor had Frankie-George himself when he happened along. Miss Lamb, appearing momentarily in the yard, was cautiously hailed and questioned, but she was no more enlightened than before.

By noon perhaps half a dozen loungers were hanging about the Bemis gate, chatting and guessing. It was almost mail time, and people on the way to the post office often took the short cut through Bayberry Lane. The train had whistled at the station, so the group was on the

point of breaking up, when Frankie-George—perhaps it should be explained that his surname was Hammond and he was called "Frankie-George" to avoid confusion, as there were two other Frank Hammonds in Ostable—Frankie-George saw an automobile approaching.

"Here comes Cap'n Mark," he announced. "That's his flivver, ain't it?"

"Who's that with him?" asked Mr. Bush. "Looks like Cyrenus himself. I declare if it don't! Don't very often see them two together, do you? Wisht I had the amount of money that is represented aboard that auto."

"Humph!" observed Jonathan Beasley, another of the group. "I'd ruther have what the fellow aboard this other one is worth. I wouldn't ask no more in *this* world. Here comes Judge Copeland's limousine."

Sure enough, from the opposite direction another car was approaching, a car big, glittering, radiating pomp and prosperity. Miss Althea drew a long breath.

"Judge Copeland and Cyrenus Stone and Cap'n Mark Bearse," she exclaimed, reverently. "The three most talked about men there is in all Ostable township. I declare, that's singular, ain't it? You—you don't suppose they is meetin' here on purpose, do you? Somethin' about that house?"

Frankie-George knocked that surmise flat.

"Huh!" he grunted. "Judge Copeland wouldn't meet Cyrenus Stone nowhere no time for nothin'. They ain't spoke for years and you know it, Althy."

Nor did they speak now. The flivver—an open runabout—drew up beside the Dillingham gate. The limousine, its chauffeur at the wheel, purred majestically by. Within Miss Althea and the others caught a glimpse of

Judge Daniel Webster Copeland, Ostable's great man, portly, florid, dignified. The judge nodded graciously to them. He did not look at the car across the road.

Upon the seat of the little runabout sat Captain Mark Bearse, retired steamboat captain, bank director, owner of fish weirs and cranberry bog property, Congregationalist, Independent Republican. Captain Mark was round, red-faced, sturdy.

Beside him sat Cyrenus Stone, native son, resident of the least fashionable section of North Ostable, also owner of weir and bog property, bank director too, dabbler and speculator in real estate, free thinker, Democrat, local "boss" of his party. Cyrenus was tall, gaunt, square chinned.

He lifted his long legs over the foot rail of the little car and stepped to the ground. The group across the road strained eager ears. Conversation between this pair was always certain to be worth hearing, but just now it might be incalculably precious. The day was still and every word spoken was plainly audible.

"Much obliged, Mark," said Mr. Stone. "Do as much for you some time, if I have the chance."

"That's all right, Cyrenus. Glad I happened along. No use walkin' when you can ride, even in a tin craft like this one of mine."

"You bet! Won't you come in and see how the old house looks inside? I guess likely Henry and Marietta have got the windows washed enough by now to let a little light in."

"No, thanks, Cyrenus. I'd like to first rate, but I can't stop. I don't imagine it's changed a whole lot since old Cap'n Sam's day. Besides, if I did come in I'd only be

guessin' who you're openin' it up for. Say, you haven't let it to the President for what the newspapers call a summer White House, have you?"

Stone chuckled. "Nothin' like that," he replied.

"No, I imagine not. Don't cal'late a good Democrat like you would let it to a Republican President, anyhow. Eh? Ha, ha!"

"I'd let it to Judas Iscariot if he had the money to pay a year's rent in advance. . . . Maybe you'll think that's about what I——"

"Eh? Go on. What was you goin' to say?"

"Oh, nothin'. I swore up and down that I wouldn't tell a soul and I've got to keep my word. You'll find out soon enough, Cap'n, and when you do——"

"Well, when I do—what?"

"Why, then you'll know. And maybe you'll remember the Judas Iscariot part, too. . . . Ha, ha! Thanks for the ride."

He strode into the yard. Captain Mark and the group by the Bemis farm saw him enter the house by the side door. A moment later they heard the shrill voice of "Mary's lamb" raised in greeting. Henry Payson emerged from the tool house and stumped to and in at that same door, closing it behind him. Captain Mark Bearse shook his head in exasperated perplexity, as one forced to give up a riddle, started his car and rattled on and disappeared around the corner in the direction of the post office.

Late that afternoon a vanload of furniture was delivered at the old Dillingham house. The van was a strange one, having upon its sides the name of a Brockton firm of movers. The furniture itself, so Miss Althea made out by persistent and uncomfortable peeking beneath her window

shades, was not remarkable either for quantity or quality. She would have liked to question the driver and his helper, but Henry Ward Beecher Payson was superintending the unloading and she scarcely dared risk another interview with him. She retired that night very much excited, tormented with uncomfortable forebodings, but with the hope that the following day might, and probably would, bring the answer as to who and what her new neighbors were to be. And there was some satisfaction in the thought that she would probably learn that answer sooner than any one else in North Ostable.

She rose at six the next morning, but all through the forenoon her watching was unrewarded. Henry Payson came early, unlocked the Dillingham door and appeared to be busy within, but no one else came, not even Cyrenus. Marietta came not, evidently her share of the "cleaning up" was done. As noon, and mail time, drew near, Shubal Bush and Frankie-George happened by and, as on the previous day, paused by her gate. They had learned nothing new. The secret was still a secret.

"But all hands down to the post office last night wasn't talkin' about nothin' else," declared Shubal. "There's somethin' mysterious in this whole thing; you mark my words. Lots of folks thinks the reason Cyrenus don't tell is 'cause he's ashamed to."

Frankie-George shook his head. "It takes some consider'ble to make Cyrenus Stone ashamed," he proclaimed. "He's a mighty shrewd business man and this Dillingham property is the only bad speculation I ever heard of his makin'. He's let it now and anybody'd think he'd be so glad that he'd make his brags, but he don't. Keeps shut up tight as a clam. When he let it afore, to them no-account

thievin' Acostas, he didn't make no secrets of the deal. Just grinned and said so long's he got his rent *he* didn't care. And yesterday he told Cap'n Mark—we heard him say it—that he'd let it to Judas Priest himself if——"

Miss Althea corrected him.

"It was Judas Iscariot he said," she put in, precisely.

"Well, Judas somebody, don't make no difference. And yet——"

Mr. Bush interrupted. "Ain't that somethin' or nother comin' acrost the fields?" he demanded. "Looks like a horse and team, don't it?"

Frankie-George and Althea turned to look. A few hundred yards beyond the end of the Dillingham fence another road—or lane—joined the sandy road upon which that property fronted. Originally, in the old days before the innovation of the motor car, this lane had afforded a short cut through the woods, past Shillaber's Pond, over Cannon Hill, joining, two miles further on, the main thoroughfare to Denboro. It was a bumpy, miserable byway even then, but since the autos came it was scarcely ever used and was now bush-grown, weedy and neglected. And yet, along its winding ruts at this moment a horse and buggy were rocking toward them.

"Well, my sakes alive!" exclaimed Miss Althea. "Who on earth is that, usin' *that* road?"

Shubal removed his spectacles, wiped and readjusted them.

"A horse and buggy!" he exclaimed. "Who's ridin' a horse and buggy these days, I want to know?"

Frankie-George squinted, peered, and slowly shook his head.

"The only horse and team in this town belongs to Lem

Ryder," he declared. "And Lem's horse is that old brown thing his Uncle Isaac willed onto him. This horse is white—or was once. Who in time——"

Althea gasped. "You don't suppose it—you don't suppose it can be——"

Shubal whistled. "Judas Priest, I'll bet you!" he cried. "It's got to be. Who else is it?"

The buggy, surrounded by a cloud of dust, bumped and creaked and shook from the lane to the road. The horse's head turned to the left, their direction. The equipage—shabby, worn, and antique, both as to motive power and vehicle—came opposite the Dillingham gate and stopped.

"Two men," mused Frankie-George. "Don't know either of 'em, do I? Eh? Why, yes, I do, too. That feller drivin' is David Cahoon's boy, from East Denboro. But the other——"

"I never see the other one afore," whispered Shubal. "Don't seem as if I ever had—and yet—and yet there's somethin' sort of familiar about him, at that. Seems as if—— Don't he look familiar to you, Frank?"

Frankie-George looked, so did Miss Althea. The Cahoon boy, plump, shabbily dressed, freckled, alighted from the old buggy. The antique horse, minus a check rein, drooped his venerable head and snatched a mouthful of dusty grass from the roadside. The other occupant of the buggy sprang out. A tall man he was, thin and somewhat stooped, his mustache dark, the hair at his temples gray; a man not old and yet not young; a man whose age it would be hard to guess; a man——

"Here's your bag, Mister," said the Cahoon boy. "Shall I take it into the house?"

It was an old bag, bulky, knobby and much worn.

There were foreign labels, several of them, plastered upon its sides. The boy lifted it from the floor of the buggy.

"Shall I take it into the house for you?" he asked again.

The man had not heard him at first. He was gazing at the weather-stained shingles and faded blinds of the old Dillingham house and, although his driver's question this time reached his ears, for a moment it seemed scarcely to penetrate his understanding.

"Eh?" he exclaimed, awakening with a start. "Oh! . . . No, put it down, son. I'll take it in myself. . . . How much do I owe you?"

The boy grinned. "You don't owe me nothin'," he declared. "You settled up with father afore we started. Don't you remember?"

The man nodded. "Ye-es," he said, slowly. "I remember your father's settlement perfectly. But I don't remember settling with you. And you brought me over, you know—you and the horse. Now how much——"

"You don't owe me nothin'," reiterated the boy stoutly.

"How much do I owe the horse?"

"You don't owe him nothin' neither."

"Sure? Oh, I guess you're mistaken. He looks as if somebody owed him something. I should judge that I owed him about fifty cents. Say—ah—by the way, what is his name?"

"Jim," replied the boy, grinning more broadly than ever.

"I see. We'll respect his age and call him James. Ah—er—James, I owe you fifty cents, don't I? . . . He doesn't answer. Silence gives consent. Here is fifty cents, son. You invest it for James, to oblige him—and me. Good-by."

The boy took the half dollar which was pressed into his hand and, looking pleased but rather foolish, climbed again to the buggy seat.

"Thanks," he said. "I—I don't want to take it, though."

"Of course you don't. Perhaps that's why I'm giving it to you."

Another grin. "Father says," observed the youngster, "that folks have to take a good deal they don't want in this world."

"I see. Your father is quite right."

"Yes. . . . He says the main thing is to take it standin' up. He didn't mean money, though, I guess likely."

"Probably not. Give your father my fraternal respects, will you?"

"Eh? . . . Oh, yes! . . . Good-by, Mister."

The man nodded. James, who appeared to have dropped asleep with his mouth full of grass and dust, was jerked into wakefulness and reluctantly urged into a rheumatic walk and then a trot. The buggy moved away. Its late passenger, standing by the gate, looked after it, then down the road, then across it, and became aware of the group in front of the Bemis premises. Each member of that group was staring at him with open eyes and mouth.

For a moment the new arrival returned the stare. Then a slow smile twitched the corners of his mouth. He had picked up the bulging bag with the foreign labels, but now he put it down again and, his hands in his trousers pockets —a posture which looked as if it might be habitual with him—strolled deliberately across the road. Upon the three faces which watched his approach there dawned a look of suspicion, followed by one of amazed incredulity,

changing to belief and then to horrified certainty. From three pairs of lips came exclamations indicating these feelings—and others.

The stranger spoke.

"Good morning, Althea," he said cheerfully. "Hello, Shubal. How are you, Hammond?"

Nobody answered. Miss Bemis choked, gasped and turned toward her front door. She looked as if she were contemplating running away. Mr. Bush and Frankie-George looked as if they would like to. The stranger smiled again, a tired smile.

"I wondered if you would recognize me," he observed. "I see you do. . . . Well, it's a pleasant morning."

He turned on his heel and strode back again to where he had left his bag. He had reached the latter, picked it up, and was on his way to the side door of the Dillingham house before the faculty of speech returned to Miss Bemis and her companions. Then it returned to each of the trio simultaneously.

The Dillingham side door opened into what had been the dining room. Upon his knees—the plural is used advisedly, for his wooden leg began below the left knee—Henry Ward Beecher Payson was fitting a caster to what was obviously a second-hand table. He heard the step upon the threshold and looked out from under the table.

"Hello, Henry," observed the man with the bag.

Henry swore aloud. Then he scrambled from beneath the table, pulled himself up by its aid and with a step and a stump, stood before the stranger.

"Doc!" roared Henry Ward Beecher Payson. "Oh, by godfreys mighty! Doctor Nye! How—how are you?"

His face beamed. He held out both hands.

"Doctor Eph!" he roared again. "You've come, ain't you? You have, by time!"

"Yes, Henry, I've come."

"*Gosh!* I'm glad to see you."

"Are you?"

"*Am* I? Don't you believe I am? You *know* it. What do you mean by askin'——?"

"All right, Henry, all right. I do believe it."

He took one of the Payson hands and shook it heartily.

"I never was gladder to see nobody in *this* world," proclaimed Henry.

"Thanks. But you're lonesome."

"Lonesome? Why am I lonesome?"

"Because you're the only person in the neighborhood who *is* glad to see me. . . . Look here."

He led the one-legged man to the open door. From it could be seen the front of the Bemis house. The group by the fence was no longer there. Shubal Bush and Frankie-George Hammond were hurrying up the road, bound to the post office, news-distributing center for North Ostable. Miss Althea was not to be seen, but the shades in her parlor windows were up As they looked these shades were drawn down violently, emphatically, even viciously.

Ephraim Nye smiled once more, his faint, tired smile.

"The prodigal returned," he observed, "and his fellow townsmen fell upon his neck—heavily. Or, to misquote again from the same source, 'A certain—er—thief fell among friends and the friends sprang up and choked him.' Henry, the Bemis window curtains interpret the welcome of North Ostable."

Henry stared at him. "I don't know what you're talkin'

about," he declared. "But that's nothin'; I never used to know more'n half of what you was talkin' about in the old days. As for Althy Bemis, she's an old cat—beggin' the pardon of every four-legged cat in Ostable County. And——"

"Yes, Henry?"

"No matter what you say, Doctor Eph, I'm darn glad to see you here. Now then, where's the rest of your dunnage? That satchel ain't all you've got, is it? Want dinner right away? Hungry, ain't you?"

Half an hour later a little automobile raced, at unprecedented speed, along Bayberry Lane and stopped before the gate of the Dillingham place. Althea Bemis, hastening to peep beneath her drawn shades, saw Captain Mark Bearse climb clumsily from the driver's seat and roll up the walk to the side door.

In the dining room Ephraim Nye was seated at the table, eating the meal which Payson had prepared for him. He heard the car stop and the heavy tread upon the walk. He rose to his feet and turned to the door just as the captain reached it. The two men looked at each other.

Bearse was the first to speak, and his speech was a bellow.

"It is, by glory!" he shouted. "I didn't believe it when they told me—and I don't know as I believe it yet. . . . But it *is!* . . . Eph! Eph Nye! Why, you—you old——"

He was too excited to finish the sentence, but stood there waving his fists in the air. There was a gleam in the other man's eye, but except for that he showed no signs of emotion.

"How are you, Mark?" he said, quietly.

Captain Mark gasped.

"How *am* I?" he repeated. "Why, what's the matter with you? Is that all you've got to say to me after—after all these years? How am I? . . . Why, Eph!"

He stumbled over the sill, his mammoth hand outstretched. Nye did not take the hand.

"Wait a minute, Mark," he continued. "Haven't you forgotten? Careful. Better use a disinfectant. I might be—er—catching."

"Catchin'? . . . Oh, be hanged! Why, Ephraim, is that the way you talk to me after—after——. What's the matter with you? Give me that fist of yours or—or I'll use mine on your thick head. Give it to me."

He seized it and held it tight. Then, in almost the exact words he repeated a statement made by Henry Ward Beecher Payson.

"By glory!" he cried fervently. "Eph Nye, I'm glad to see you."

Ephraim smiled. "I'm glad to see you, Mark," he said.

Payson appeared in the doorway leading from the kitchen. He grinned.

"Good for sore eyes, the sight of him is, ain't it, Cap'n Mark?" he demanded. "Say, Doctor Eph, don't look as if I was goin' to be quite so lonesome as you tried to make out, does it? . . . Oh, Cap'n, the old checker board is in amongst his things. I just run afoul of it, unpackin'. What do you think of that, eh?"

Bearse laughed aloud. "You don't tell me, Henry!" he cried. "Well, well, well! And the last game he and I played I would have had him licked in two more moves, if we had gone on. I would—and he knows it."

Henry chuckled. "Ain't no reason why you can't go

on any time now, Cap'n," he declared. "The board and the checkers, too, are right out on the kitchen table. And Doctor Eph's come back to North Ostable to stay."

Captain Mark's expression changed. He gazed earnestly up into his friend's face.

"So I heard at the post office just now," he said. "Is it true, Ephraim?"

"Yes, Mark."

"You're goin' to—to live here in—in North Ostable?"

"Yes. Unless my fellow townsmen furnish me free transportation elsewhere—on a rail."

"His old signboard's come, too," put in Payson. "'Ephraim Nye, M. D.' He says it's goin' up again out in the front yard. Look natural, won't it, Cap'n?"

Captain Bearse, for a moment, looked grave and troubled.

"You're plannin' to—to practice medicine here again?" he asked.

"Yes. If any one is rash enough to give me the opportunity."

"Sho! . . . Well, of course, I—I——"

"I know, Mark. But that's all right. Don't you worry. It isn't your funeral. You have a reputation and a character and I expect you to be careful of them. You're a good fellow to come here at all, but you shouldn't have done it. I'm paddling my own canoe and I don't expect to carry passengers."

"Oh, shut up! You be damned! Sit down and finish your dinner. I've got to go now, but I'll be back after supper to-night. Henry, you dust off that checker board and have it ready! Doctor Eph and I have a score to settle on it this evenin'!"

"Mark! Stop! Don't be an idiot! I don't want you to visit me to-night—or at any time."

"Be still! Save your breath. And if you've got any spare time this afternoon you better practice up on checkers. I'm goin' to lick you to-night."

CHAPTER II

PEOPLE were "sitting up late" that evening in North Ostable, and not only in plebeian North Ostable, but in the most aristocratic sections of Ostable proper—which is very proper indeed. Mr. Shubal Bush, for example, did not return from the post office to his home on the Shell Road until half past nine, and, after arriving there, did not go upstairs to bed until a quarter past eleven. Mrs. Bush—Christian name Angelina—had an aunt visiting her from Wapatomac, and this relative—Olinda Pepper, aged seventy-nine, single, and possessor of several thousands which the Bushes hoped to inherit—furnished the latter pair a Heaven-sent excuse, not only to discuss the sensation which the return of Doctor Ephraim Nye afforded—no excuse was needed for that—but to resurrect the scandalous story connected with his name and past history.

Shubal and Angelina performed the resurrection ceremony and Miss Pepper acted as audience and more than occasional chorus. She was thin, sharp-featured, talkative, deaf, and as hungry for gossip as a gull is for sand-eels. She was not satisfied with generalities, but desired particulars, and when she did not hear clearly, which was pretty often, demanded to be told all over again. Mr. Bush, himself so excited as to be rather incoherent, and who, not possessing his wife's politic prudence nor whole-heartedly sharing her affection for the aged rela-

tive, found Aunt Lindy's persistent quest for knowledge decidedly trying.

"So," said Shubal, addressing Angelina, "as nigh as anybody can make out, Cyrenus had a letter from him askin' if the old Dillingham place was still to let and, if 'twas, if he'd rent it out to him. Henry Payson he fetched over the letter—it didn't come by mail, seemed so—and Henry and Cyrenus they fixed up the trade betwixt 'em. Doctor Ephraim's hired the place on a two-year lease and nobody seems to know what the price is, but all hands cal'late it's high."

Aunt Lindy broke in here.

"Who's he?" she demanded.

Mr. Bush, halted in full career, turned a dazed look in her direction.

"Hey?" he queried.

"Hi," said Aunt Lindy. "Who's he?"

"He? Who?"

"Hi."

Shubal lost patience. "You needn't holler 'Hi' no more," he shouted. "I hear you."

"All right. I'm glad of it. Now who is he?"

"Who?"

"Hi."

"Oh, my soul to mighty! Can't you say *nothin'* but 'Hi'?"

"Hey?" asked Aunt Lindy.

Mrs. Bush cut in here to explain that her husband had referred to a high price, not a "Hi" person.

"No such thing," declared Miss Pepper, testily. "He was talkin' about this doctor critter that's hired that old house. But he said *his* name was Ephraim. I guess I

heard him, didn't I? Or I would have heard him if he'd talk out loud, 'stead of settin' there whisperin' and whisperin'."

Angelina and Shubal exchanged looks. "You better begin at the beginnin' and tell the whole thing, all of it," said the former under her breath. "You'll have to do it afore you get through, so you might as well begin now. And, for mercy sakes, holler!"

Shubal groaned. But he began at the beginning as requested. And, also as requested, he "hollered."

He had known Ephraim Nye when the latter was a boy. His father's name was Ephraim; so was his grandfather's. The latter was Captain Ephraim Nye, commander of the *Sea Wind* and the *Fair Fortune* and a half dozen other clippers equally fast and famous. Old Captain Ephraim built the big house over on the Main Road beyond the Methodist church in Ostable, the house where "them Clapps, from New York," live in the summer time. The house was sold when Ephraim Nye, Doctor Eph's father, "failed up" in the wholesale fish business. That was in 1890, when Eph was a boy. Ephraim, the father, died two years later. His widow and her son lived in a little house on the back road in Ostable until the widow's death. "She was a Bassett," explained Shubal. "Constance Bassett her name was afore she was married, and her dad was Cap'n Jared Bassett. He was a smart skipper in his day, wan't he, Angelina? Why, don't you remember, when him and old Coffin——"

"Who did?" This, of course, from Aunt Lindy.

"Never mind, never mind," put in Mrs. Bush, hastily. "It didn't amount to anything, Auntie. Go on, go on, Shubal. Stick to the doctor."

"Humph!" disgustedly, but in a tone discreetly low, "how can a body stick to anything with her singin' out 'Who—who—who' all the time, like—like one of them owls?" (Shubal pronounced it "aowls.") "I—— Oh, all right, all *right!* I'm *tellin'* you about Eph Nye, ain't I? LISTEN!!"

He went on to tell of the boy's life in Ostable. Mrs. Nye died when her son was seventeen and in his final year at the local high school.

"A queer critter he was even then," he declared. "Smart scholar, and all like that, but—but queer, you understand. Never talked much, he didn't, unless he felt like it, and you never could tell just what he was liable to say. I remember, one time I'd been workin' down to the wharf, openin' scallops, and on my way home I felt kind of hungry and I set down 'side of the road to eat a little bite I'd had left in my dinner pail. There was a chicken leg, I recollect, and I was settin' there eatin' it when this Eph Nye boy come along. 'Hello, Ephie,' says I. He says, 'Howdy do!' And I says, 'I ain't eatin' supper,' I says, 'I just had this little mite of chicken left and I thought I might's well get rid of it now as to lug it home in the pail.' He looked at me, solemn, and then says he, 'You think a bird in the bush is worth two in the hand, eh?' Well, sir, I couldn't—— Eh? Oh, you see it, do you?"

Aunt Lindy was chuckling. "That was a good one," she observed.

Shubal seemed a bit chagrined. "Of course *I* see it, after a spell," he proclaimed; "but at first I couldn't make out what he was drivin' at. Forgot my name was Bush, for the minute, I did. However, that don't make no dif-

ference; what I'm tellin' you about it for is just to show you what a queer young one he was. I've thought about it a good deal since, and seems to me that I and the rest of us had ought to have realized that a boy queer as all that wasn't liable to come to no good end. Yes sir-ee! I'd ought to have realized it. But I didn't, and neither did other folks. Why——"

His wife interrupted here, bidding him get along faster or it would be breakfast time before he finished.

"You haven't begun to get to the important part at all yet," she declared. "Hurry up, for mercy sakes!"

"Look here, Angie; who's tellin' this yarn?"

"You are, that's plain enough. Anybody else would have had it told by now."

Aunt Lindy chuckled again. She seemed to have a perverse faculty of hearing the very things not meant for her ears. Mr. Bush glared at her.

"All right," he observed, with dignity. "Then you can get 'em to tell it. I'm through."

This should have been a crusher, but Mrs. Bush declined to be crushed.

"I'll tell you, Aunt Lindy," she said. "His mother died and he went away from Ostable, this Ephraim Nye did, and the next we heard he was goin' to college up to Boston. They'd sold the house and furniture, but they didn't fetch much—Ostable property was cheap in those days—and from what we heard he didn't have but a little money, had to work his way, so folks said. Summers he did all sorts of jobs. Why, one time we heard he'd gone along of a sort of explorin' party away up to a place called Labrador. Once he drove a team for a man in New Hampshire. And

one summer he—— Didn't he take care of two rich children, Shubal?"

Her husband sniffed. "He tooted 'em, if that's what you mean," he vouchsafed.

"*Tooted* 'em! He learned 'em their lessons, that's what he did."

"Well, a-all right. Have it your own way. You call it learnin', I call it tootin'. And that's what *they* called it, or their folks did, for I heard——"

"Oh, never mind, never mind. Anyhow, he worked his way through college and then he went to another place, a kind of medicine school it was, and studied to be a doctor. Next he was in a big hospital, one of the doctors there. Not a real doctor, but a—a—hum—what do they call those young doctors in hospitals, Shubal?"

"What's the use of your askin' *me?* When I tell you the right names for things you don't pay no attention."

"Well, I'll pay attention now. What is it?"

"Humph! . . . Never mind."

"That means you don't know. Well, I remember it myself now, it's an interne. That's what Eph Nye was in that Boston hospital, an interne. And it was while he was internin' there that he met Fanny Copeland. And his meetin' her and marryin' her was the real reason for his comin' back here to Ostable and buyin' out old Doctor Blodgett's practice and startin' in to be our doctor here. Fanny Copeland——"

Aunt Lindy asked a question:

"Copeland, did you say?" she asked. "Any relation to that stuck-up Daniel Copeland?"

Shubal gasped. His wife looked shocked. Miss Pepper was guilty of *lese majesté* and sacrilege.

"She was Judge Copeland's sister, that's who she was," proclaimed Mr. Bush, with righteous indignation. "And Judge Copeland was then, same as he is now, one of the big men of this county."

"Pig men? Yes, I guess likely."

"I didn't say 'pig'," roared Shubal. "I said 'big'."

"Humph!" sniffed Aunt Lindy. "Big pig. Well, he looks like one."

Mr. Bush raised a horrified hand and was about to raise his voice, but his wife hushed him to silence.

"Sshh, sshh, Shubal!" she whispered. "Don't stir her up. I forgot that Judge Copeland was lawyer for the railroad when her cow was killed. Sshh! . . . All right, Aunt Lindy. We know you don't like the Judge. Anyhow, Fanny was his younger sister and she was the one that Doctor Ephraim married."

Miss Copeland, so Angelina went on to say, had come to the Boston hospital as a patient. She was young, pretty, and the pet of her brother, who was a dozen years older than she. Even at that time Daniel Copeland, although not as well-to-do as he had since become—he made a lot of money in stocks during the war, so people said—was the leading citizen of Ostable. He was a widower with one child, a daughter, and Fanny had lived with him.

" 'Twas her nerves she went to the hospital for," explained Angelina. "They'd broke down, and no wonder, for if ever a girl went it, she did. She was always sort of frail, but pretty and lively, same as I said, and she loved dancin' and nice clothes and jewelry and theaters and travelin' and—and——"

"And the fellows, I suppose likely," added Aunt Lindy.

"Well, yes, she did like the fellows and they liked her.

She was run after all the time she lived with her brother, and the summer crowd was runnin' just as hard as the winter ones—harder, because she wouldn't have much to do with the young men that lived here all the time. They wasn't swell enough for Fanny Copeland, she flew higher. Daniel he made a regular pet out of her and spoiled her, I guess, sort of. But anyhow her nerves gave out, or she thought they did—although I guess likely the disease that she finally died of was the real trouble, even then—and she went to this hospital for treatment. And there she met Ephraim Nye, and the next thing we heard was that they were goin' to be married."

"That was a surprise, too," put in Shubal. "Course we'd heard that Eph was gettin' on first rate at his trade and was liable to be a A No. 1 doctor one of these days, but nobody thought he was high-toned enough for Fanny Copeland to hitch up to. I cal'late he must have gone after her hammer and tongs and, she not bein' very strong and the like of that, he sort of made her say yes. That's the way I size it up."

His wife looked doubtful. "I don't know," she observed. "It always seemed to me that Fanny was more set on him than he was on her. Doctor Eph wasn't ever what you'd call a real handsome man, but—but there was somethin' about him that made you like him. You couldn't help it."

Mr. Bush snorted disdainfully. "Rubbish!" he declared. "*I* could help it all right. The women folks liked him, but they always shine up to a doctor or a minister. When he was doctorin' here and all you females was makin' such fools of yourselves over him, was *I* cruisin' in his wake? No sir-ee! I was always suspicious. 'You

wait,' says I. 'Just wait and see. A new broom,' says I, 'gathers no moss, but'——"

Angelina interrupted. "Why, Shubal Bush!" she exclaimed. "What silly stuff you're talkin'. You never said any such words. You was as crazy over him as all the rest of the Ostable folks. You know you was."

"No such thing. Me? Crazy nothin'!"

Aunt Lindy grunted impatiently. "What's your bein' a crazy nothin' got to do with Dan Copeland's sister and this Nye man?" she demanded.

Shubal, very red in the face, was about to protest, but his wife did not give him the opportunity. She hastened to resume.

"Well, anyhow," she said, "Doctor Eph and Fanny did get married and he bought out old Doctor Blodgett's practice and come to Ostable to settle. That was the biggest surprise of all, because everybody figured that Fanny Copeland would pick out a bigger place than Cape Cod to live in. New York or Washington would suit her better, we thought. But no, down they come and he commenced doctorin'. And he did awful well at it, too. Built up a fine practice, twice what Blodgett used to have, goin' way to Denboro and Harniss to see sick folks and bein' busy night and day. His wife, she was busy too, though in a different way. She was just as gay as she ever was, goin' to dinners and parties and chasin' 'round with the summer crowd while he was workin' and earnin' money. He earned a good deal, but even at that we couldn't see how he could earn enough to give her the things she had, new clothes, and jewelry and di'mond rings and trips to New York and everywheres. Where they all come from *we* couldn't see."

"We found out later on, though," put in Shubal, significantly.

"Well, yes, we did. Besides his doctorin' the doctor found time to be pretty busy in town affairs and church work and such. One of the things he was was treasurer of the fund for buildin' the new Congregationalist meetin'-house. The Congregationalist folks had been raisin' money for that church buildin' for a long spell and they had over ten thousand dollars in the bank here. 'Twas in Ephraim Nye's name as treasurer and the plans was drawn and the work commenced. Then—*then* the thing happened."

She paused. Miss Pepper sighed. "So somethin's goin' to happen at last," she observed. "Well, that's a mercy. I begun to be afraid a body as old as I be wouldn't last long enough to hear about it. What did happen?"

"About everything happened and happened all to once, too. The new church building had been raised and framed and boarded in and 'twas time for the folks that was doin' the work——"

"Snow and Ryder had the contract," cut in Shubal. "Orham firm of contractors, they was. That was a mistake, anyhow, 'cordin' to my notion. I said so at the time; all hands heard me. 'What's the idea,' I says, 'of sendin' a job like that out of town? If there's work to be done here, give it out here, that's what I say,' says I. But no, they went right ahead——"

"Sshh, sshh!" This from Angelina. "What do you suppose Aunt Lindy cares about that? Do let me tell this story, can't you?"

"Course I'll let you tell it, but——"

"What's the matter now?" demanded Miss Pepper sharply.

"Why, Shubal says——"

"Oh, fiddle de dee! What's that amount to? Get along, get along!"

"Well, then—— Hush, Shubal! Don't say anything to hurt her feelin's."

"Hurt *her* feelin's! My heavens and earth!"

"Yes. If you make her mad there's no tellin' what she'll do. She was talkin' yesterday about leavin' her money to the old woman's home. . . . Yes, yes, Aunt Lindy, I'm goin' right along. Well, the first payment for the buildin' work was due and the committee went to the bank for the money. Course Doctor Nye was treasurer and he would have been the one to draw it, but he was in trouble and they didn't want to bother him. His wife—Fanny Copeland that was—had been to New York and she'd come home awful sick; it was her last sickness, as it turned out, but we didn't know it then. The rest of the committee—Judge Copeland was one—went to the bank and, when they got there, instead of there bein' over ten thousand to the church credit, there was less than three thousand. Yes, less than three thousand dollars was all there was left."

"My sakes! You don't say!" exclaimed Aunt Lindy. "Where had the rest of it gone to?"

"That's what they wanted to know. Then it turned out that a check for seventy-two hundred against that meetin'-house fund had come back to the bank the week afore. It was made out to—to——"

"Made out to 'Bearer' 'twas," interjected Shubal. "And

'twas signed 'Ephraim B. Nye, Treasurer.' I see it myself, and that's how 'twas made out and signed."

"Yes," went on his wife, "but on the back of it was stamped the name of some New York folks, stock brokers they was. Their names was on it because they'd deposited it in their bank first. . . . Well, of course, the church committee they couldn't make out what Doctor Eph had drawed all that money for and they went right off to him to find out. He was out of town for the time bein', seein' somebody that was sick over to Bayport, but when he come back that night they was waitin' for him. They was havin' a meetin' down in the meetin'-house parlor and they sent for him. And when they showed him the check he made out to be as surprised and upset as anybody else—more so, from what I hear—and declared right up and down he'd never seen the check afore, let alone signin' it."

"But I thought you said he had signed it," interrupted Aunt Lindy.

"His name was signed to it, all right enough, but he said he hadn't put it there. Said somebody else must have signed it for him. Stuck right to it that he'd never laid eyes on the thing afore."

"*Then* there was a time," declared Shubal.

"I guess *so!* Nobody knew just what to do and so they didn't do anything. And the next day he sent for 'em to come and see him, and when they come he took back all that talk about not knowin' about the check and owned up he was responsible, after all."

"My soul to mercy!" ejaculated Miss Pepper.

"Um-hum. I guess you'd have said so if you'd been here then. Of course all hands wanted to know what he'd signed it for and what he'd done with the money. He

wouldn't tell 'em. Wouldn't say a single word more than that the check was his. There must have been a dreadful goin'-on at that committee meetin', for if the minister himself had stole the communion cups nobody would have been more surprised and upset. Doctor Eph Nye was—was—well, he was kind of a—a President of the United States in this town and they couldn't, the most of 'em, believe he was a thief. Judge Copeland, his own brother-in-law, was 'most crazy. He kept beggin' him to explain about it, and—and the like of that, but he wouldn't. Wouldn't say a word except that the check was his and that the seventy-two hundred was gone. It ended by their givin' him until the next day to think it over in. And that next day his wife was so much worse that they couldn't go near him, and so the whole dreadful business was kept secret in that committee for 'most a week. And durin' that week Fanny died."

"Sho!" exclaimed Aunt Lindy.

"Yes, she died, and 'twas a mercy, poor thing, for she was saved all the disgrace and shame of seein' her husband arrested and put in jail. After the funeral they arrested him and the news come out. I've lived in Ostable all my life long, but I've never seen the whole town—yes, and the county, for that matter—so knocked in a heap as 'twas then. All hands talked about nothin' else and they kept on talkin'. The only one who wouldn't talk was Doctor Eph himself. He wouldn't say a word and they couldn't get him to. From then on he kept still, and when the trial come off he wouldn't say anything either. Of course, it wasn't much of a trial, because he'd owned up that he'd drawed the money and 'twas gone, so he was guilty, that's all there was to it. The Judge—Judge Pearson 'twas, and

he'd known and liked Ephraim Nye for years same as everybody else—he 'most broke down when he give out the sentence. Five years in state's prison 'twas, and they took him away to serve his term."

Aunt Lindy breathed heavily. "Well, I swan!" she observed. "And didn't they never get any of the money back, or find out what he'd done with it, or anything?"

Mr. Bush jumped once more to the center of the stage. "You let me tell that, Angelina," he ordered. "I know more about it than you do. They did get some of the money back, quite a lot of it then, and the rest—well, that comes later. Judge Copeland was the sharpest set on gettin' it. He was Ephraim's brother-in-law, but he was the most down on the doctor of anybody. 'Twas account of Fanny, and natural enough, too. He idolized his sister and he was of the opinion that she had suspicioned her husband's rascality for quite a spell and had brooded herself to death over it, as you might say. 'Twas the Judge that pushed the trial on and found fault with the lightness of the sentence. I've heard tell that he said they'd ought to have sent the scoundrel up for life, that he was just the same as a murderer, and such talk as that. Of course the doctor had a little money put by, and they levied on that. 'Twas only a few hundred dollars—which was another surprise, for all hands had cal'lated he must have done pretty well, with such a practice. But he hadn't saved much—speculated and lost it, so they guessed likely. However, his wife had left him everything she had and there was consider'ble jewelry and one thing or 'nother. That was turned in and fetched two or three thousand. Altogether they scraped about thirty-five hundred out of the wreck and about two year ago the rest come back."

"Come back! Come back from where?"

"*I* don't know. Nobody knows where it come from."

"Why, yes, they do, too, Shubal. How you talk! Doctor Ephraim sent it back. Or his lawyers did; that's the same thing."

"But how'd he get it to send? Nobody knows *that*, do they? Of course they'd raised more money—Judge Copeland put his hand in his own pocket and give the most of it—he's a fine man, *I* tell you!—they'd raised it and the new church buildin' was up. Somethin' to be proud of, 'tis, too. I don't suppose there's a finer meetin'-house on the Cape than that one is. I've heard summer folks say that they never see one more——"

"Oh, my land of love, what's he talkin about now? *I* know the Congregationalist meetin'-house, don't I? Angelina, tell me about the money comin' back. Who sent it back?"

"Why, Doctor Eph did, Aunt Lindy.—Hush, Shubal!—Where he got it from is a mystery, but folks guess maybe he did some more stock speculatin' and was luckier than he had been afore. At any rate, about two years ago the church folks got a letter from some Boston lawyers with a check for all the shortage on the fund—all that was left after sellin' the Nye things and Fanny's jewelry—and with interest from the time of the money was took up to then. The lawyers said they represented Ephraim B. Nye and was sendin' the money at his orders, or somethin' like that. Course all hands wanted to know more about it, but they couldn't find out, them lawyers wouldn't say another word. The church took the money, though."

"Took it! Why wouldn't they take it?" demanded Shubal. "'Twas theirs, wan't it? They took it and was

thankful to get it. Why, if anybody stole money of me——"

"Hey?" queried Miss Pepper.

"I say if anybody stole money from me——"

"Humph!"

There was a certain sarcastic quality in this ejaculation which Mr. Bush resented.

"What you humphin' about?" he demanded. "If anybody stole money from me I'd take it back quick, if I had the chance."

"Back where?"

"Back where? What kind of talk's that! I say if——"

He went on to say and Aunt Lindy continued to provokingly misunderstand and her niece to explain and act as peacemaker. It was some minutes before the conversation returned to the subject of Doctor Ephraim Nye.

Meanwhile, amid surroundings vastly different, that same subject had been under discussion. In the handsome living room of the Copeland house on Silverleaf Way, once Dock Road, in Ostable Center, Judge Daniel Webster Copeland discussed it with his daughter, Faith. The Judge had heard the news of Doctor Nye's return to his native town and the said news disturbed and distressed him greatly, so much so that his appetite for dinner had been impaired and his magisterial serenity quite lost. The meal over, the pair were in the living room, the door closed and locked. Ordinarily Mrs. Hallett, the Copeland housekeeper—the Judge was a widower—would have shared the family society, but not this evening. She had heard and seen enough during dinner to realize that her company

would not be welcome. She had gone to her room and the Copelands were alone.

The Judge, portly, red-faced and frowning, paced the floor, his hands behind him. Miss Faith, eighteen, slender and attractive, home from boarding school for the spring vacation of her senior year, sat in the big leather chair which her father usually occupied while enjoying his after-dinner smoke. She, too, was troubled, but largely because of his evident distress of mind. For her there was in the situation a distinct element of novelty. They were speaking of her uncle, Ephraim Nye, the family black sheep, a man whose name had not been spoken in that household since she was a young girl.

Judge Copeland walked the floor and his daughter watched him.

"I'm so sorry, daddy," she said. "It is dreadful."

Her father did not answer. He strode from the library table to the bookcase by the wall, turned and strode back again.

"I'm so sorry, daddy," she said, again. "Sorry for you, I mean."

He waved his hand, impatiently. "Every one will be sorry for me, I suppose," he said. "Every one except Stone and people like him. They will laugh and enjoy the situation, doubtless. Anything which makes me uncomfortable will be nuts for Cyrenus Stone."

She sighed. "I can't see why politics make people hate each other so," she mused. "You have never done anything to Mr. Stone except—except——"

"Except beat his man for the Congressional nomination and prevent his making George Ellis postmaster. That and a few other things like that—which are enough."

"But George Ellis wasn't a fit person to be postmaster. Just think of it! One of those South Ostable Ellises postmaster of Ostable!"

"I wouldn't think of it, of course. But Stone swore to get even with me. . . . Well, it looks as if he had done it."

"Do you think he was responsible for bringing—bringing that man back here to live?"

"He has rented him a house to live in, hasn't he? And there is a lease of two or three years—longer, some say."

Another short interval of silence. Then said Faith:

"Daddy, why did he come back here? Here, to this town, of all places! I can't understand it."

"Neither can any one else. Unless, as I say, Stone hired him to come, to disgrace us."

She shook her head. "Do you think," she said, "he is a man that could be hired to do anything he didn't want to do?"

Her father stopped in his stride and turned to look at her.

"What do you mean by that?" he asked, sharply. "What do you know about him—except what every one knows?"

"Why, not much, I suppose. But I remember him well. I was almost ten years old when—when it happened. And I used to be with him and Aunt Fanny so much, at their house and here. He was always good to me. I—I liked him, daddy, I always liked him. I—you didn't know it, but I cried myself to sleep night after night when they took him away. . . . Forgive me. Of course I realize now what a dreadful man he must be, but I was very fond of him, I couldn't help it."

The Judge might well have been angry, she rather expected him to be, but he was not.

"I know," he said. "We all liked him. He had a kind of—of devilish fascination about him that attracted every one, especially the women. Your poor aunt was wild about him, devoted to him. She gave up her life for him, or what amounted to that. I shall always believe that she had found him out, long before the rest of us did, and that that was really responsible for her death. . . ." He paused, and then added, under his breath, "Damn him!"

Faith asked another question.

"Did he treat her badly?" she asked. "I didn't know. Of course I wouldn't, I was only a child."

"I don't know how he treated her. He always seemed kind enough. Of course, after it all came out, I remembered things. I remember several times, toward the last of it, finding her shut up in her room and crying. She wouldn't tell me what the trouble was—yet she and I were a lot closer than most brothers and sisters. She said she was not well and that that made her despondent. Perhaps it did, but I think now there was more than that."

"How did they come to marry? He was a boy here in Ostable, wasn't he?"

"Yes, but they were only casual acquaintances then. The rest of it began when she went to that Boston hospital. She had had a nervous breakdown and I sent her there for treatment. Her trouble was a rather obscure disease of the nerves and—and that fellow was a young doctor specializing in such things. And he was clever, too—yes, he was. Why, I have been told by other doctors, good ones, that if he had gone on with his specialty, instead of marrying your aunt and coming down here to

a general country practice, he might have become one of the greatest men in his line. I wish to heaven he had."

Miss Copeland thought it over. "I don't see why he didn't keep on," she said. "I suppose Aunt Fanny wanted him to come here. He must have been very fond of her—then, at least."

Her father nodded. "We all thought so," he admitted. "Although I must say that I was not in favor of the marriage at the time. It seemed to me that Fanny might do much better. She was very popular, and very attractive. . . . Poor girl!"

"It wasn't a long engagement, was it?"

"No, very short. I urged her to wait longer, to wait at least until she was sure—until I was surer that he was the right man. But she wouldn't. She was in a tremendous hurry to marry him, I don't know why. If it wasn't foolish to believe such a thing I should almost think she was afraid she might lose him, after all."

"Why? What do you mean? He was fond of her, wasn't he? You said he seemed to be. There wasn't any one else, any other woman?"

"I don't know. Once your aunt said something to me which led me to suspect. . . . But that is nonsense, of course. No doubt he realized how lucky he was. Of course he did. Probably he fooled her as he did all the rest of us. . . . The scoundrel!"

"Was he—did he ever do anything else, before he took the church money, anything which made you guess he was—not a good man?"

The Judge turned and faced her. "No," he said earnestly. "He was peculiar, queer, had all sorts of what I call silly notions about 'reforms', and independence in

politics, and all that. He and I didn't agree on many things, but we always got on well enough. He would make me angry and then say some ridiculous thing to make me laugh. He was absolutely impractical, would leave a rich summer patient to go and see a no-account Portygee that he thought needed him more, even though he knew he would never get a cent for it. We used to row about that—but, well, Faith, I would have bet my last dollar that he was honest. Yes, my last dollar. If there was no other reason I would have sworn he didn't care enough about money to steal it."

"And yet he did. And such a mean theft, too."

"The meanest possible. From his own church and his own neighbors. The meanest, yellowest trick a man could play."

"But why did he do it, daddy? Why?"

"Nobody knows. I presume he had been speculating. The check was endorsed by a man in New York whom we both knew. He had endorsed it and this firm of New York brokers had cashed it for him. Presumably he turned the money over to Nye. We couldn't find out because—and it was one of the oddest things in this whole wretched business—this man—Raymond his name was—started West the day after the check was cashed and died very suddenly on the train. He was rich and a regular customer of the brokerage firm. There was nothing strange in their cashing a check with his endorsement. They had often cashed bigger checks than this one."

"Wouldn't—wouldn't he—Aunt Fanny's husband, I mean—tell what he did with the money?"

"He wouldn't tell anything. He wouldn't say a word further than to acknowledge the check as his. I pleaded

with him. I told him to tell me the truth, only the truth, no matter what it might be, and I would use all my influence to help him. For the sake of his poor innocent wife, I told him, I would do anything. I never shall forget the way he looked at me when I said that. He smiled, actually smiled, as if there was something funny in the ghastly business. But he wouldn't say a word, then or afterwards. When Fanny died I saw him again. I called him a murderer as well as a thief, and he merely looked at me. That was the last time I saw him. I put him out of my life, did my best to forget him. . . . And now he is back here, the jailbird!"

"But why, daddy—oh, *why* has he come back?"

"God knows! I shall see him to-morrow. He and I will have an understanding, be sure of that. . . . But, Faith, don't *you* have anything to do with him. Don't see him, don't speak to him, don't think of him. And if he ever dares to speak to you——"

Faith sprang from the chair, her eyes flashing.

"Speak to me! He! . . . Oh, he *wouldn't* dare! He must be the meanest, most despicable man in all the world. I shall hate him, daddy—*hate* him!"

Captain Mark Bearse was a widower. He owned a comfortable home on the Back Road in North Ostable. The Back Road in North Ostable is by no means as select a neighborhood as Silverleaf Way in Ostable Center, but it is about the best section of that part of the township, and Captain Mark's good-sized white house was as good as the best there. His lawns were always cut, his shrubs always trimmed and no paint was lacking where paint should be. The most noticeable thing about the Bearse

front lawn was that it was still enclosed by a white picket fence. The captain's neighbors had long ago supplanted their fences by hedges, but he refused to do so. He liked the fence, he declared. It was a good fence, taut, trim and shipshape. He liked it, and if other folks did not they might look the other way. Captain Mark Bearse was nothing if not independent.

His sister, Matilda Hopkins, aged fifty-eight—the captain was fifty-one—kept house for him. She was a widow and, like her brother, refused to let other people do her thinking for her. Consequently there were lively arguments in the Bearse household, lively but amicable. Mrs. Hopkins would argue with her brother until the last gun was fired, but if an outsider ventured to take part in the battle, no matter upon which side, she and Mark promptly joined forces and, together, they proceeded to blow the intruder out of the water.

On this particular evening they had argued all through supper. Now, the meal being over, Matilda rose to clear the table and Captain Mark to step to the hatrack by the dining room door where hung his cap and overcoat.

"So you're goin' there, no matter what happens?" observed Mrs. Hopkins.

"I am," replied Mark, twisting his bulky shoulders into the overcoat.

"I suppose so. Well, you know what folks 'll say, don't you?"

Captain Bearse stated that he did not give a sulphurous trifle what folks said.

"Eph Nye was the best friend I had in the world when he lived here," he declared. "I used to play checkers with him twice a week then, and you know it."

"Oh, I know it."

"Well, if he was my friend then, he's my friend now, ain't he?"

"I suppose likely he is—if he wants to be."

"Wants to be! Why wouldn't he want to be? He'll need his friends more'n ever, or I miss my guess. I'm goin' over there to-night to play checkers with him—and I'm goin' to lick him, too. You hear *me.*"

"Um—yes. I've heard you before."

"Well, I did lick him sometimes, didn't I?"

"Sometimes there's white blackbirds, but not often. Mark, you know as well as I do, that Doctor Nye's comin' back here to Ostable to live is goin' to raise more hullabaloo than anything that's happened since he was taken away. If you stick by him you're goin' to be with a slim crowd and a queer one. The handful that voted with you to buy the old Good Templars' chapel and make a town lock-up out of it won't be a patch for slimness and queerness on the two or three that will have a good word to say for Ephraim Nye."

"Huh! Buyin' that chapel would have been good business and saved the town money. I said so then, and I say it now."

"But usin' a buildin' that was put up to hold temperance meetin's in as a place to lodge tipsy tramps over night would have been kind of—well, odd, maybe. Oh, I know there's no use arguin' with you when your mind's made up, but I must say——"

"You needn't. You've said it already."

"Mark Bearse, *do* you know why Doctor Nye has come back here to live—and practice?"

"No. I told you I didn't."

"And, honest now, don't you think his doin' it is about the craziest thing you ever heard of?"

"Well—well——"

"You know you do. Cyrenus Stone rented him the Dillingham place because he wanted the money and would, same as he said, have let it to the Old Harry himself for the same reason. But he ought to be ashamed of himself. And as for Ephraim Nye——"

"Well, as for him—what?"

"He has been in state's prison. He took the church's money——"

"Matilda, that'll do. I'll let you say 'most anything, but there are some things you can't say."

"Well, didn't he take it?"

"No."

"Mark, be reasonable. He owned up that the check was his. He wouldn't say a word in his own defense. He pleaded guilty——"

"He didn't."

"Well, he did the same thing; he didn't plead not guilty. And, after he got out of prison he sent the money back. If that isn't the same as owin' up that he took it, then *I* don't know."

"Humph! If I give a dog a bone it don't necessarily follow that I stole a beefsteak, does it? I wouldn't care if Ephraim Nye had sworn on a pile of Bibles that he stole that church money, even then I wouldn't believe him. He didn't steal it for the same reason that a sheet anchor won't float—it ain't made that way. Ephraim Nye isn't a thief and never was; he *couldn't* steal. . . . There! Anything more to say?"

"I guess not. What's the use? Oh, dear! here's more

trouble and worry and squabblin'. And, as usual, we'll be right in the thick of it."

The captain pulled his cap down upon his forehead. At the door he turned.

"I'll be back by and by," he said. "Leave the door unlocked for me. . . . Eh? What's that?"

His sister was wrapping something in a newspaper. She looked a little sheepish.

"It's some of those ginger cookies we had for supper," she said. "I thought maybe you'd take 'em along with you. When the doctor used to come here so often that time when you had the rheumatic fever, he always used to like my ginger cookies. Used to say they was better than anybody else's in town."

CHAPTER III

MOTOR CARS, like humans, show the effects of age. A man of seventy may be hale and sturdy and good for, perhaps, another decade of usefulness—even more. But, nevertheless, he does not get about with the easy facility of youth. He makes more fuss about it. Captain Mark Bearse's runabout was not seventy, but it was not young, and its progress was accomplished with a good deal of fuss. Ordinarily the captain did not mind the clatter and jingle of his "tin car." "While she ticks she goes," he was wont to say. But, on this particular evening, as he buzzed and rattled along Bayberry Lane, he wished that she did not tick quite as loudly.

He was not in the least ashamed of the fact that he was going to call upon his old friend, the *bête noir*—although he would not have called him that—of Ostable township. When Mark Bearse did a thing he did it openly, and he had openly championed Ephraim Nye, not only in the days when the latter and his crime were the sensations of the community, but ever since whenever challenged. He had been delighted to welcome him back, he was overjoyed at the opportunity of visiting him and resuming the interrupted series of checker games—but it did irritate him to realize that he was, so to speak, journeying toward that first game to the sound of trumpets and the clashing of cymbals. He knew that, in every dwelling along Bayberry

Lane, there was but one topic of conversation that evening, also that the inmates of those dwellings would be on the watch for new developments pertaining to that topic. Therefore every clank and groan indicating the usual digestive disturbance beneath the hood of his little car to him that night was a voice proclaiming to prying ears: "There goes Mark Bearse to call on that Nye man. Shouldn't you think he'd be ashamed!" Captain Mark was not in the least ashamed, but he was angry and resentful. It was during that journey that he first began to seriously consider his sister's oft-repeated suggestion that it was high time he bought himself a new automobile.

The side door of the Dillingham house was open when he entered the yard. Henry Ward Beecher Payson, dish towel in hand, was standing in the doorway. Henry's welcoming hail was hearty, but not, under the circumstances, too tactful.

"I knew 'twas you, Cap'n Mark," he declared. "Heard you comin' for the last ten minutes."

"Huh?" grunted the captain, and pushed by him into the dining room. The man he had come to see was not there.

"Doctor Eph's in the settin' room," explained Henry. "Go along in, Cap'n." Then, raising his voice, he called: "Here's Cap'n Mark come to see you, Doctor."

Bearse went into the adjoining room. It was a small apartment, one of those rooms which, situated in the middle, so to speak, of an old New England house, seemed to be almost completely surrounded by doors. A door from the dining room, of course; a door to the front parlor, one to the small bedroom—there was always at least one first-floor bedroom in houses of this age—a door

opening upon the stairs leading to rooms above, and a closet door. There was but one window. The chimney front and mantel separated the closet and parlor doors and here a stove had been set up, an old-fashioned, ugly "gas burner," obviously second-hand. The rest of the furniture consisted of a table, with a kerosene lamp upon it, a battered sofa and three chairs, one of them a rocker. In the rocker, beside the table, sat Ephraim Nye smoking a pipe. He was gazing intently at the glow of the fire behind the isinglass panes in the stove door and apparently was quite unaware of his visitor's presence.

Captain Mark looked at him for a moment without speaking. The lamplight shone directly upon the side of his head and face as he sat there, and the captain noted, as he had not done in their meeting that afternoon, the changes which had taken place. The hair, as thick as ever, but sprinkled with gray upon the head and almost white at the temples; the deep lines between the brows and at the corners of the mouth; the general expression. Nye had been away from Ostable nine years. That, according to Bearse's mental arithmetic, should make him thirty-six or thereabouts. Dear, dear! how much older than that he looked. At least ten years older. He looked, so the captain thought, almost as old as *he* was—he, Bearse—and that was fifty-one—precisely.

"Well, Mark," observed Doctor Nye, ceasing to look at the fire and turning to face his caller, "will you come in; or do you like the distant view of the ruins better?"

Captain Mark started. "Glory!" he exclaimed. "I thought you was asleep, Eph. What do you mean, talkin' about ruins? Did you know I was here all the time?"

The doctor rose from the rocker. "I heard you come,"

he said. "That is, I heard a car turn in here and I guessed it was yours. And Henry Ward Beecher announced you from the pulpit, you remember."

"Yes, yes, so he did. But—I've been standin' here in the doorway for the Lord knows how long and you never made a move."

"So? I'm sorry. I was thinking, Mark. 'Thought alone is eternal.' That is a poor excuse for keeping you waiting an eternity. Come in. Sit down."

He pushed the rocker toward his guest. The latter, removing his cap and coat, sat down.

"Sounds natural," he observed, as he did so. "You haven't forgotten how to spout Shakespeare."

"Shakespeare? . . . Oh, you mean that 'thought eternal' business? That isn't Shakespeare, Mark, that is from 'Lucile.' When I was a boy, Lucile flaunted on our parlor center table while Shakespeare hid in the closet. . . . Well, let me look at you. Humph! A little less hair and a little more weight, that's all. You have aged about four years in nine, Mark. That's a good average. How is Mrs. Hopkins?"

"Matilda? Oh, she's smart. Glory! I came nigh forgettin'. She sent you somethin'!"

He rose and pulled from his overcoat pocket the parcel intrusted to him by his sister.

"Some of her ginger cookies she sent you," he explained. "She says you always used to cal'late they were about right."

Nye opened the little parcel. He looked at the cookies in silence for a moment. When he did speak it was but a few words, yet Captain Bearse knew that he was greatly pleased.

"So?" he observed. "Please tell her that I'm still ready to swear my calculations were correct. . . . And thank her for me, will you, Mark?"

"Eh? No, I won't. I shan't do your errands for you. You can thank her herself when you stop in at the house to see her. And any time later than to-morrow will be bad manners. Don't forget that."

The only answer was a smile. The captain was noticing, even at this early stage in their renewal of companionship, a new trait in his friend. The doctor's face had become almost expressionless. Perhaps not that exactly—when he smiled his eyes had a trace of the old twinkle and the corner of his lip lifted in the old way; but for the most part it was as if he had schooled himself to hide his feelings, as if he wore a mask.

He laid the parcel of cookies upon the table.

"Sit down again, Mark," he said. "And smoke, of course. I can't offer you a cigar, but there is the tobacco can. And the matches. I can even provide a pipe, if it is necessary. I hope it isn't."

Bearse, mumbling something to the effect that he would as soon think of comin' without his shirt as his pipe, produced that ancient and smelly implement, filled and lighted it. Then, sitting in the rocker, he puffed and gazed through the smoke at his host. The latter, sitting in one of the other chairs, gazed at the fire.

It was an embarrassing moment for the captain. There were a hundred questions he wanted to ask, a hundred things he would have liked to say, but the whole situation was so difficult, so unexpected and impossible. Yet he knew that he must say something.

"Well—er—Eph," he blurted, after an interval much

too long, "what you been doin' since I left you? Practicin' up your checker game? I hope so, for I'm all set to lick you, right here and now."

Doctor Eph leaned back in his chair and crossed his knees.

"Mark," he said slowly, "I'm sorry to see you here to-night."

His visitor gasped. "Sorry——" he began. "Well, I'll be damned!"

"Yes, that's what you'll be. You couldn't invite damnation any more cordially than by coming here to see me. You know it."

"Eph Nye, I told you this afternoon——"

"You did, and I told *you*. And now I'll say it just once more. You are making a big mistake in coming here to this house. Everybody knows you. Everybody also knows me. . . . Mark, did you ever read Boswell?"

"Eh? Who's he? What's that got to do——"

"I'll tell you. There was a man once named Johnson. He was a fat man and, I suppose, a wise man; at least he thought he was, and he talked a great deal. There was another fellow who made it his business to write down the—er—words of wisdom that fell from Johnson's lips. It kept him busy. A great many words fell, enough to make six volumes or more. Boswell's Johnson is one of the classics that every one is supposed to read—and few do. I never had the time to read it until—until I went where I had more time than anything else. I read a good deal then and I read Boswell."

"Well, what of it? What in time is this; a sermon?"

"Maybe. If so, it will be my last from this text and—I want you to believe this—I should feel happier if you

profited by it. What made me mention Boswell is something which the man Johnson said and Boswell recorded. Johnson was talking about some one—*not* a leading and respected citizen like you, Mark, but never mind: he said, as I remember it, 'Let him go to some place where he is not known. Don't let him go to the devil, where he *is* known.' You think that over."

Captain Mark's thinking did not seem to help him much. He shook his head.

"Maybe you know what you're drivin' at," he observed, "but I don't. If you mean that the old Scratch knows me, why—well, maybe he does, but—but I ain't goin' to him yet, if I can help it."

"But you are coming here. I am the particular private and public devil of Ostable township, and when you associate with me you do yourself a lot of harm. I appreciate your coming, old man. I know why you come. I'd rather see you than any one on earth. But you will make me a lot happier by staying away—for a while, anyhow."

The last sentence was spoken with an earnestness unmistakable. It had about as much effect upon the captain as a pea-shooter might have upon a stone wall.

"Eph Nye," he snorted, "if that's your sermon it's as poor as any I ever heard preached—which is sayin' some consider'ble. You talk like a fool."

"No, I talk like Doctor Johnson. It is a pity that I haven't a Boswell on the premises. Mark, think! You are in politics, or you used to be. Knowing you, I'll bet you are yet. You have influence for good in this town, and a following."

"You be hanged! And the followin' be hanged, too!"

"You have a sister. She is a worker for the church. She——"

"She's got sense. If she hadn't she wouldn't belong in our family. You needn't lug her in. And say, she sent you those cookies, didn't she? Don't cal'late she'd be feedin' the devil cookies, do you?"

"Mark——"

"Eph, be still a minute. You've asked me a lot of questions, let me ask you one. It's the one that's puzzled me more than anything since I was in school and sailed in to tackle compound fractions. You've been gone from Ostable a matter of nine years, as I figure it. I haven't heard from you. I wrote you three or four letters. Did you get 'em?"

"Yes, Mark."

"Humph! Well, you never answered 'em. And I went up—up to——"

"To the—er—hotel which the state provided me."

"To where you was, no less than three times to see you. And they gave me to understand you didn't want to see me."

"I did want to see you. That is, if I had wanted to see any one it would have been you. But—well, perhaps you understand."

"I cal'late likely I do. That's all right. But I've tried to keep in touch with you then and since. I knew when they let you out—I mean when you left that place. I heard about your goin' over to the other side—to the war. You was a sort of—of medical man over there, wasn't you?"

"I was a surgeon with the French Army."

"Yes, so I heard. And I heard what they said about you, too. They didn't call you any *bad* names, I'll swear

to that. Then I lost track of you, but says I to myself, 'He's all right now, Doctor Eph is. He'll go off West or somewheres, where his trouble isn't around to plague him, and he'll start in to be the big man at his job that I know God A'mighty meant him to be.' That's what I said. And now—*now,* by glory, the next I hear is that you've come back to the place where there isn't anything for you *but* trouble. Here's the question that's botherin' me, Eph Nye: For the Lord sakes *why* did you come back to Ostable, of all places in creation? Why?"

Doctor Ephraim did not speak at once. When he did he prefaced his remark with another slow smile.

"Mark," he said, "you are not as original as I rather thought you might be. Don't you suppose every adult male and female in Ostable is asking that very same thing?"

"I shouldn't wonder. Why wouldn't they ask it? What are you goin' to tell 'em?"

"Nothing."

"Nothin'?"

"Yes, just that. . . . But I'll tell *you* the truth."

"Good! Let's have it."

"Very well. I don't know why I came back."

"You don't *know!* . . . My glory! Is that what you call the truth?"

"Yes. It *is* the truth, as far as it goes."

"Well, it might go a couple of miles less and still be out of sight. Humph! The average man wouldn't find much difference between my question and your answer. I say I can't guess why you came back, and you say you don't know. . . . Oh, come, Eph; talk sense! You had some reason, of course."

Nye opened the stove door and knocked the ashes from his pipe upon the hot coals. He nodded, slowly.

"Why, yes, Mark," he admitted, "I suppose I did." He got up, walked over and closed the door to the dining room, then returned to his chair. "I had a reason, if you can call it that," he went on. "When I left the—er——"

"The place where you was," put in Captain Mark, hastily.

"The prison," continued Doctor Eph, calmly, "I didn't know where to go or what to do. Fortunately—for me, of course—there was a war going on. I thought at first of enlisting in the British or French army. Then I decided that perhaps I could help more by saving life than by taking it, at any rate I believed I could do as good a job. I had some friends—still had one or two—in my old profession. They helped me along. I went over and worked with the French surgeons. When the armistice was signed I came back; had no other place to go, you see. Then an aunt of mine died. She was—well, it doesn't matter, she was my aunt, that's enough. She had renounced me, of course, like all decent, sensible people."

"Here, hold on now," protested Bearse. "*I* never renounced you, did I?"

"I don't remember classing you as sensible. Well, the old lady died, and after her death it developed that she had—humph—experienced a softening of the heart, or the brain, or something. At any rate, because of my work over there she pretended to think I had, as she said, 'expiated my sin.'"

"Yes, yes. Sure thing! She'd heard about your gettin' one of those crosses or medals or whatever they are. I

heard about that, myself. A man up to Boston, a doctor 'twas, he——"

"All right. That doesn't matter. She died and left me ten thousand dollars."

"She did! Good on her head! . . . Eh? Why, say, that explains where you got the money to—to . . . Sho! Beg your pardon, Eph. None of my business, that isn't."

"Perfectly proper. It is everybody's business, like myself. Yes, that is how I was able to send back the—the remainder of my—er—stealings to the church."

"Eph——"

"Hush! It is no more than I should have done, is it? Ostable didn't consider me over—er—liberal, did it?"

"Don't make any difference. It isn't everybody that would have done it, just the same."

"It isn't every—er—criminal who inherits ten thousand dollars. Then I went out West for a time, did some laboratory work in one of the hospitals, and a good deal of thinking on the side. Mark, whatever you do during the remainder of your life, don't take to thinking. Take to drinking, if you must—and can get the raw material—but don't think. It is, literally, a hell of a habit."

Captain Mark sniffed. "There isn't much danger," he declared. "Ask Matilda. She'll tell you that I 'most generally do things first and then think afterwards whether I'd better do 'em or not."

"Humph! I thought before—and I'm still thinking. I came East again and then decided to come here. Having decided, I needed an accomplice, so I wrote to Henry Payson. He always seemed to like me, poor devil. Or perhaps it is revenge on his part. I cut his leg off, you remember, and he, I suppose, wanted to get square. So

he helped me to get this—er—palace. . . . By the way, no doubt he is waiting out there in the kitchen, wondering why we have shut him out of this confessional."

"Let him wait. Heave ahead with the rest of your yarn."

"There isn't any more. I hired this house of Stone, hired Payson to be cook and chambermaid, and—here I am."

"Yes, that's so, here you are. But, my glory, man! *Why* are you here? What in the name of all that's crazy made you pick out Ostable, the place where—where——"

"Yes, I know—where. Perhaps that's the answer, Mark. This was the place where—as you say. What is that thing in the Old Testament? . . . Oh, I did a lot of reading in that—er—retreat of mine up yonder, Mark. . . . 'He shall return no more to his house, neither shall his place know him any more.' This place hoped and expected never to know me any more. I decided to fool it, that's all."

Bearse nodded sagely. "I know why you've come here," he declared. "Know it as well as if you'd told me. This was the town where you—the town that put a label on you. Nobody else but you would think of such a thing, but, *bein'* you, you've come back to make 'em take that label off. Isn't that about it?"

The doctor did not answer. He had refilled his pipe, now he lighted it. The captain nodded again.

"That's it, of course," he said. "Well, I guessed as much in the beginnin'. More power to your elbow, son. I admire your spunk, but as for your judgment——"

"You refuse to commit yourself, eh? You think the war I saw over there won't be a patch upon the fight I'm in

for here. All right, it will be a fight, and—and you'll agree with me that I have precious little to lose. . . . But there, I've said a lot more than I meant to say, even to you, Mark Bearse. Now this you must understand thoroughly. It is my fight and, win or lose—make your bets ten to one on the losing—I'm going to fight it alone. You mustn't, and you shan't, be mixed up in it."

"Is that so? I'm here, ain't I? All right. And I'm going to keep on comin' here. You may be Admiral or Commodore or Grand High General Commander in this scrap of yours, but there never was a Admiral or General yet that didn't need somebody afore the mast or in the ranks. I've enlisted. Say, look here, Eph Nye, do you think you're goin' to have all the fun yourself? Did you ever know anybody that loved a row any better'n I do? You bet you never! And you can't keep me out of this one."

"Mark, don't be a fool."

"Why not? You're one, aren't you, for comin' back here? Sure thing you are! And I'm goin' to be another. Hooray for crime!"

The one-sided smile was in evidence again as Doctor Nye slowly shook his head.

"Mark," he began, "there are limits to foolhardiness. I left here a convicted thief, the meanest kind of a thief——"

His friend interrupted him. He struck the rickety table an alarming thump with his fist.

"Shut up!" he bellowed. "You know what I told Matilda? I told her that if Saint Peter himself said you stole that church money, I'd call him a liar. Now don't talk to me any more—not that way."

For a full minute Nye gazed intently into the flushed face of his visitor. Then he rose and, opening the door to the dining room, called to Mr. Payson.

"Henry," he ordered, "bring in that checker board, will you?"

CHAPTER IV

THE next morning, shortly after breakfast, another caller came to the old Dillingham house. Miss Althea Bemis saw him come, just as she had seen Captain Bearse come the evening before. Henry Ward Beecher Payson met him at the door, just as he had met Captain Mark. But, whereas the sight of the captain had caused Miss Althea to sniff disgustedly and Henry to grin his delight, this person's appearance wrung a gasp of awesome excitement from the Bemis breast and no grin accompanied the Payson greeting.

Henry had been stumping about the dining room, a broom in his hand. Doctor Nye was standing by the window, not that commanding a view of the yard and the inhabited section of Bayberry Lane, but the window looking toward the north, from which there was a barren prospect of bare hills and hollows and sea and distant pine groves. A cloudy sky, across which ragged brown clouds were driving before a cold wind, made the outlook even more hopelessly dreary.

Henry Ward Beecher stumped from one side of the room to the other, making perfunctory motions with the broom. Doctor Eph, his hands in his pockets, gazed at the lonesomeness without. Mr. Payson, having cleared his throat noisily several times, tried a more direct method of attracting his employer's attention.

"Well, Doc," he observed, "this ain't so good a day as yesterday was, is it?"

No answer. Apparently the doctor had not heard.

"Eh?" queried Henry. "I say to-day ain't so fine as yesterday was, is it?"

"No."

"Yes. No, I mean. It's sort of overcast and smurry. Wind's about no'theast by no'th. Shouldn't wonder if we had rain afore it's done."

"Before what is done?"

"Eh? Why, the—er—weather. Well, 'twon't be long afore summer's here. Let 'er come, I say, don't you?"

"Who?"

"Why, the summer. Can't come too quick for me, summer can't. Let'er come."

"Thank you, Henry; I will."

"Eh? . . . Oh, he, he! Yes—yes, I cal'late she'll come anyhow, no matter whether you and me let her or not. I'll be glad. Won't have so much durn rheumatics in my ankles after the warm days set in."

"In your ankles? You mean your ankle, don't you?"

Henry leaned the broom against the dining room table. "Why, no, I don't," he declared. "I mean in my ankles, both of 'em. That surprises you, don't it, Doc?"

"Somewhat."

"Um-hum. Well, there's lots of surprisin' things in this world, and the longer you live the more they surprise you. I'll never forgit how surprised I was the first time I felt that rheumatiz in the foot you sawed off, Doctor Eph. I was layin' in bed, you understand, and 'twas one of them cold, raw mornin's same as we're liable to have along Thanksgivin' time. I'd been—er—out the night afore." Henry paused, looked a trifle sheepish and added, "Out—er—I mean *out,* you understand."

"I understand, Henry. You had been 'out' that night before your accident."

Henry snorted. "Yes, I had," he admitted. "I'd been out too everlastin' long *that* night. When a feller sets down and goes to sleep with his back against the switch handle and his leg stuck out underneath a freight car, he's been out, all right. Well, that was a lesson to me, that was."

"I remember you said it was going to be."

"Yes, and I meant it. You bet you I look out where I go to sleep nowadays. Or, if I don't, I make arrangements ahead to have somebody look out for me."

"Humph! If I were you I wouldn't go out quite so often."

"Oh, I don't, Doc. No—no. Ain't been more'n a couple times in the last two years. Ain't nothin' much nowadays to go out with," he added mournfully.

Nye smiled. Henry nodded. "No—no," he went on, "a feller ought to think twice afore he tackles the heft of the stuff that's fetched around these times. Bluey Batchelder was over from Orham night afore last Fourth of July and he kind of got me up in a corner down to the post office and nudged me—the way a feller does when he's got somethin', you know—and he says, 'Henry,' says he, 'you come outside. I got a Fourth of July present for you,' he whispers. So, naturally, I went."

"Naturally."

"Eh? Yes—yes. Bein' sort of curious, I went. And he had one of them flat pint bottles in his inside vest pocket. Don't hardly never wear a vest, Bluey don't, but he wore one then—felt safer, I presume likely. 'You

sample that, old boy,' he says. Course I didn't care nothin' about samplin' it, but it seemed sort of—of dispolite to say no, so I took a couple of swallows."

He paused and groaned.

"Well?" queried Nye.

Henry groaned again. "'Twan't well," he declared. "The fust swallow filled my inside full of turpentine and the next one set it on fire. Don't talk to *me!* I never needed no more celebration *that* Fourth of July. I'd *drunk* fireworks enough to last me through. 'Twas some sort of pison he'd made himself and that's why he was so blamed anxious for me to try it. Don't ask me what he made it out of. He wouldn't tell and I didn't have any throat left to ask him with. I swore right off then and there."

"Good idea, Henry. Better keep on swearing."

"I have. Next time anybody offered me a drink I made 'em taste it themselves fust. I'm a temperance man these days—er—mostly."

He had, apparently, forgotten all about the rheumatism in his wooden leg and the doctor did not remind him of it. Instead, he asked a question.

"What have you been doing for a living these last seven or eight years?" he inquired.

"Oh, just scratchin' along, same as usual. Nobody has much use for a one-legged man at a steady job, seems so. I worked for the town, fixin' the roads, but I didn't stay at it long. Worked too hard, I cal'late; that's against the rules on a town job, so they laid me off. Then I've hoed gardens and such like for the summer folks. Worked for the Barstows and the Holworthys and all one summer for the Powells. . . . Eh? What say?"

Doctor Nye had not said anything, but he had turned away from the window and was regarding his man-of-all-work with a most peculiar expression.

"For—whom?" he asked.

"The Powells. They're summer folks. Old man Powell bought that big Nickerson house up towards the Center. Old Cap'n Lorenzo Nickerson's it used to be. Cap'n Lorenzo, he——"

"Who is this Powell?"

"He ain't any more. He died four years ago. Name was Wentworth Powell and he come from New York."

"Oh!" The doctor seemed to have lost interest again. He turned back to the window.

"Why?" inquired Henry. "Didn't know him, did you, Doctor Eph?"

"No."

"I cal'late not. He's dead. Mrs. Powell's been here a couple of summers, but she's over to Europe now. I hear she's comin' back to open the house, though, this season. She ain't old Wentworth's—— Eh? Who's that knockin'?"

He moved to the door. Miss Bemis, peering beneath her window shades, her bosom still agitated by the awesome thrill before mentioned, saw that door opened. She was too far away to see Mr. Payson's start of surprise, but she guessed it.

"Why—why, Judge Copeland!" exclaimed Henry. "Er—er—how d'ye do, Judge?"

Judge Copeland did not tell him how he did. He asked a question of his own.

"Is your—is Mr. Nye here?" he demanded.

Henry plainly was torn between a natural desire to pre-

varicate and an uncertainty as to whether his employer would wish him to do so.

"Why—I—I'll see, Judge," he stammered. "He—he was a—a—spell ago."

"Bosh!" impatiently. "I heard you speaking with him just before I knocked. What is the use of your talking nonsense?"

Mr. Payson was finding it difficult to frame a satisfactory reply. He was, however, saved the trouble. Doctor Nye pushed him gently aside.

"Not a bit, Dan," he said, quietly. "Merely a polite conventionality, that's all. The same thing that led you to ask if I was in when you knew I was. Join us, won't you?"

The Judge accepted the invitation. He elbowed Henry Ward Beecher Payson still further out of the doorway and stepped across the threshold. He and Doctor Eph regarded each other, Copeland flushed and agitated, Nye calm and gravely affable. Neither, of course, offered to shake hands. Copeland spoke first.

"No doubt you are surprised to see me here," he blurted. "In a way I am surprised and disgusted with myself for coming. But I came—I felt that I must come—to talk to you."

The doctor nodded. "Thank you, Dan," he said. "So far you are a distinguished minority."

Judge Copeland sniffed. "And will continue to be, so far as the respectable element of this community is concerned," he observed.

"Doubtless. Will you sit down?"

"No. But I have some things to say to you, and I prefer to say them *to* you, and not," with a contemptuous

glance at Payson, "to the riffraff of the town. Can't we go into another room?"

Nye stepped to the door of the sitting room. "Walk in," he said. "Henry, never mind the sweeping for the present. Close the kitchen door as you go there, will you?"

Acting upon this decided hint, the insulted Mr. Payson indignantly withdrew to the kitchen. The doctor followed his visitor into the sitting room and shut the door behind them.

"Well, Dan," he said, "now will you be seated?"

"No."

"As you like. That rocker, however, is fairly comfortable. The other chairs are—well, they were cheap. Won't take the rocker? Sorry."

"Oh, heavens!" Copeland's disgust overcame him. "You appear to think I came here to—to make a social call. I did not. Listen to me, Nye. You answer my questions."

Doctor Eph's lip curled slightly. "Judge," he drawled, "are you the prosecuting attorney as well as the magistrate? Or am I under cross-examination from the bench?"

"Humph! If you were, it wouldn't be the first time."

"That's true. On the previous occasion, however, you—and the other—er—bench—may remember that I declined to answer. But perhaps I shall answer now. What are your questions?"

"I want to know if what I have heard is true about your coming here to this town to live?"

"Probably not—if you heard it *in* the town. But it is true that I have hired this house and intend living here."

"It's a damnable outrage! Stone ought to be hanged."

"I can't help you there. Hanging is much more in your line of work than mine, I should think."

"Oh, *don't* try to be funny! You'll find there is no humor in the situation before many months, or I miss my guess. . . . And is it true that you intend practicing here again as a doctor?"

"Yes."

"You can't. If you practice without a license you'll go back to jail, where you belong. There is a law, thank God, against that very thing."

"Yes, Judge. You confirm the opinions of other legal lights. However, I have a license."

"You have! I don't believe it. They took yours away when you were——"

"Pardon me. You're wrong. They took away my registration, but, as of course you know, the State Board can at any time, after one year, restore that registration to a physician if it sees fit. In my case it—er—saw fit."

"I don't believe it, I tell you. It would be an outrage."

"That is a matter for argument with the Board, I should say. But I'll show you the certificate, if you wish. . . . Or you may take my word for it."

Apparently Judge Copeland was willing to take the word. He said no more about the registration, but began pacing up and down the floor of the little room. When he next spoke it was in a different tone. He turned toward Nye, his hands outstretched.

"For heaven's sake, man," he cried, "why did you do it?"

"Why did I come here—to Ostable?"

"Yes. Yes, of course, why did you come? Weren't

there plenty of other towns where you could go, where you weren't known? Where you might start again and not—not bring disgrace upon innocent people? Haven't you disgraced me and mine enough?"

The mask upon Doctor Eph's face was in evidence now. His expression was grave but absolutely inscrutable.

"Do you think so?" he observed.

"Do I *think* so! Good heavens! Your wife—my poor sister—you drove her to her death. She died of shame because of you. She——"

For a moment the mask dropped. Nye's lips tightened.

"There, there, Judge," he commanded, "that is enough of that. Fanny died of a disease which she had had for two years or more. You know it perfectly well. Her death certificate shows it. The specialists who attended her know it. She—— But we won't talk about her, if you please."

"Indeed?"

"No, we won't. Talk about me. Every one else in Ostable is talking about me, I am sure. Why should you and I trouble to be original, Daniel? It isn't necessary in this case and it—er—is never respectable."

Copeland took another turn across the room and back. Then:——

"Why did you come here?" he demanded again.

Doctor Eph sighed. "Mark Bearse asked me that question last night," he said. "I'll tell you what I told him. I don't know why I came back—exactly. But I have some vague reasons, such as they are. You are not mixed up in them at all, Judge. And I assure you that I do not expect you—or yours—to be mixed up with me. . . . By the way, how is Faith?"

"She is well and I was in hopes that she had forgotten you. I wanted her to. I, myself, wanted to forget you, and all that horrible business. And now—— Oh, for God's sake, Nye, *won't* you go away? Is it money you need? Is that what you came for?"

The doctor smiled. "Meaning blackmail, Daniel?" he suggested. "No, it isn't that."

"I didn't mention blackmail. I mean, do you need money? If you do—money to go West or South or somewhere and start over again, where your record isn't known, I'll—yes, I'll supply that money."

Another slow shake of the head. "Thanks, Judge," said the doctor. "But money won't send me away. Nothing will. I'm here, where my—er—record *is* known. I am going to live here and I am going to practice medicine here—that is, I am going to try."

"Try! Who do you think will employ you? Nobody worth while, I assure you of that."

"Maybe. Even probably. But, Judge—speaking as a member of my profession to a member of yours—don't you think the average community has enough residents who are not worth while to keep one doctor busy?"

Judge Copeland did not deign to answer. He marched to the door.

"Very well," he said. "You mean to stay. I know you well enough to see that. But—but you must be insane or—or more of an unfeeling rascal than even I believed you to be."

"Thank you. The compliment is undeserved, Judge. I am not insane."

"I wish to heaven you were."

"I have wished it myself, but those are matters which

we can't control. Neither the most respected citizen of Ostable County nor the least can control that. You and I have something in common, haven't we? A humiliating thought, Judge. I beg your pardon for suggesting it."

"If you were insane I might have some pity for you. As it is——"

"As it is, I must do without. Well—good day, Judge."

"You will be driven out of town within a year. Take care you don't force me to make it *my* business."

"I should be sorry to add to your business cares."

"I warn you, Ephraim Nye, that neither I nor my daughter will recognize you in any way. You married my sister. It is true that your ways were never mine and that we never agreed on most things, but—but there was a time when—when——"

"Perhaps we had better forget that time, Judge. You said you had been trying to forget."

"I shall never recognize you. And as for my daughter——"

"Faith is a nice girl, as I remember her."

"She is. A self-respecting girl. I wish her to remain so."

"She shall, so far as I am concerned. She may go on with the process of forgetting without the slightest hindrance from me. You may rely on that."

"Humph! . . . Nye, I, I—Oh, man, *why* do you do this thing? Are you sure that money, any reasonable amount of money, would not affect your decision?"

"I am sure. And, Daniel, I'm sorry—sorry for you, I mean—but I am going to stay. I shall try to trouble you and your family not at all, but I shall stay—unless the

driving out of town process becomes pretty drastic. I thank you for the offer, however. Good morning."

Miss Althea Bemis saw Judge Copeland stalk down the Dillingham walk to the waiting limousine. Henry Ward Beecher Payson also witnessed the exit. He entered the dining room on tiptoe.

"Lord A'mighty!" he exclaimed, fervently.

Doctor Ephraim shook his head.

"No, Henry," he observed, "merely a deputy."

"Eh?" queried Henry. Then he added, glaring after the departed one, "Stuck up old nothin'! What's he mean callin' me a riffraff?"

His employer, hands in pockets, strolled over to his outlook by the north window.

"Henry," he said, after a moment, "Judge Copeland is a good man, according to his lights. They may not be the brightest and broadest lights in the world, but he honestly thinks they are. His own conscience and the voice of Ostable

> 'Alternately proclaim him good and great,
> And make the hero and the man complete.'

Intense respectability is a terrible responsibility. Henry, if you wish to lead a carefree existence, don't ever become a universally respected citizen."

Henry Ward Beecher Payson looked rather foolish.

"I cal'late," he observed, with a grin, "there ain't any great danger of that happenin'."

Nye smiled. "While you keep your present situation," he said, "I should imagine there was not."

CHAPTER V

THAT afternoon Henry Ward Beecher Payson performed a task which afforded him extreme gratification. He made of it, in fact, a ceremony. Perfectly conscious that his every action was observed and noted from the Bemis conning tower on the other side of the way, he lingered over the preliminaries and delayed the dénouement until the last possible moment. He dug the hole in the ragged lawn down near the gate, he erected the post with care and much solicitude concerning its perpendicularity. When he nailed to the top of that post its crowning glory—or infamy, depending upon the viewpoint, spiritual and moral, of the observer—he shielded that glory—or infamy—with his body until the final nail was affixed. Then he stepped dramatically aside, and there, flauntingly brazen for all North Ostable to see, was the old signboard, weather-beaten and tarnished:

EPHRAIM NYE, M. D.

Henry stumped back to the house, chuckling.

"She's all sot, Doctor Eph," he declared. "Looks natural as life, she does. He, he, he! Cal'late that'll stir up Althy Bemis some, eh? She was watchin' every nail I drove."

"How do you know, Henry? Did you see her?" asked Nye.

"See her? No—no! But I knew she was there. There's some things you don't need to see. Go down on the meadows, salt-hayin', and you don't need to *see* miskeeters. Walk up and down Salt Crick Road—Bayberry Lane, I mean—a couple of times, and you don't need to see Althy. You can bet on her and the miskeeters bein' on deck, just the same."

"I am afraid you and I are wrecking Miss Althea's peace of mind."

"Thunder! Don't worry about that. She's havin' more excitement than she's had since Eliza Perry's false front come off in prayer meetin'. She's got somethin' new to talk about and that puts her as nigh to heaven as she's liable to be in this world, or the next neither, I shouldn't wonder."

Miss Bemis was not, of course, the only one to find material for talk in that signboard. It confirmed the rumors which had been flying about Ostable township and furnished the icing, so to speak, upon the delectable cake which the gossips were devouring. Comments were various, but almost none was favorable. Even the liberal minded, men and women who had respected and liked Doctor Nye in the old days and had been greatly shocked and grieved at his downfall, were agreed that his returning to the scene of that downfall to attempt the practice of his profession was a strange thing to do. It was impolitic, to say the least, and, to say more, argued an unrepentant, almost wickedly defiant state of mind.

There were some supporters, but they were very few. Captain Mark Bearse, of course, but people expected

almost anything of Captain Mark. He was generally for the under dog, and sometimes it seemed to make little difference whether that dog's low station was deserved or not. Besides, he had always championed Ephraim Nye and had stood for him through fire and water. Captain Mark's defense of the doctor's return was put aside as immaterial. A good man, but set as the moral law and—well—queer; almost as queer as Nye himself, although of course not wicked like the latter.

Cyrenus Stone was another who did not utterly condemn Nye for returning to Ostable. This, too, was not unexpected. Cyrenus was "contrary"—that good old Yankee word describes him well—and he was particularly contrary whenever and wherever Judge Daniel Copeland was concerned. If the Judge said *A*, Cyrenus Stone invariably said *Z*. The Judge was the leader of the town and county Republican forces; Stone of the Democratic. Copeland was intensely orthodox and could invariably be counted upon to do the expected thing. Cyrenus was atheistic and could not be counted upon with certainty except to oppose whatever the Judge might do. Each had followers, although Copeland's following was by far the larger and Stone's the less respected. They were alike in but two particulars, both were successful business men and both were autocrats. Daniel Copeland had one child, a daughter, Faith. Cyrenus had a son, also an only child; Thomas Jefferson Stone was his name and he was a young engineer not long out of "Tech" and employed by a Boston engineering firm.

Cyrenus Stone, as owner of the old Dillingham place, had been directly responsible for providing Ephraim Nye with a home, and a yard in which to erect his signboard.

Consequently the Copeland faction, in this case more than three-fourths of Ostable township, were especially shocked and resentful. Many men and women—good Democrats, too—remonstrated with Stone and told him he was making a wicked mistake. Cyrenus did not seem to care. He repeated his assertion that he would have rented the property to Judas Iscariot if the latter had come forward with the money.

"So long as he pays his rent," said Stone, "he can stay. When he can't, out he goes."

"But he has served his term in state's prison," declared one indignant individual, voicing the general protest.

"Um-hum," said Stone. "Well, there's a lot of folks that ought to serve theirs. The gang that put through that South Ostable road graft, for instance."

The South Ostable road had been macadamized by money appropriated by a Republican Board of Selectmen.

"But he is a thief."

"Well? It's somethin' to have jailed *one* Republican thief, ain't it? There's lots more runnin' around loose."

"He ought to be shunned by every decent person."

"Well, he will be, won't he? About the only one that's been to see him so far, from what I hear, is Dan Copeland."

Cyrenus, himself, however, called a day or two after the erection of the signboard. His was not a lengthy visit.

"Well, Nye," he observed, "I just dropped in to see if you were comfortable here."

Doctor Nye nodded. "To speak professionally, I am doing as well as can be expected," he replied.

"Nothin' you counted on you haven't got, then?"

"No."

"How about patients?" with a sardonic grin.

"I didn't count on them, heavily."

"Humph! How does Parker like your locatin' here?"

Doctor Parker was the Ostable physician. An elderly man, mild, politic, and carefully conservative.

"I don't know."

"But you can guess, eh? Well, it'll do him good. He's too blamed satisfied to suit me. Last time my wife sent for him it was an hour before he showed up. Been chasin' to Copeland's, I found out. King Daniel had a cold or a toothache or somethin'. I told him that when I said come I meant it. If you give him a scare you won't hurt my feelin's any."

Doctor Ephraim smiled. "Thank you," he observed. "That will relieve my conscience when I hear of his looking frightened."

"Eh? What? Oh, well, you can't tell. You may pick up a livin' here. There's lots of Portygees and folks like that that ain't particular. Good luck to you."

"Thanks. How are your family, Mr. Stone?"

"Sophrony—my wife—ain't very well; feels sort of tired, she says, and she ain't the kind to tire easy. Parker don't seem to know what's the matter with her. Probably it ain't anything much."

"I hope not. How is your son?"

"Eh? Tom? Oh, he's all right. Doin' pretty well at his work. He's goin' to be down in this neighborhood pretty soon; got a job superintendin' the new bridge they're goin' to build over to Denboro. . . . You remember him, do you?"

"Yes. As a boy."

"He's a man now. Twenty-four—no, twenty-five year old. Time flies, don't it?"

Doctor Eph did not answer promptly. He seemed to be thinking. Then he said, "Evidently it does—for some people."

The new signboard did not bring an immediate rush of patients to the humble consulting room of Ephraim Nye, M. D. A week passed and none came. Henry Ward Beecher Payson, at first confidently expectant, grew less so.

"Humph!" he grunted. "This is the eighth day since I put out that signboard and there ain't a soul been inside this gate but Cap'n Mark and Cyrenus and a feller from Denboro peddlin' fish. What ails all the folks in this town, anyway?"

The doctor looked up from the book he was reading.

"Apparently nothing ails them, Henry," he replied. "That may be the trouble."

But on the ninth day a patient came, or, if not the patient in person, one acting as the latter's agent. Nye was alone when this agent came, Henry having gone down to the village store on a supply purchasing expedition. When he returned he found his employer looking over his medicine case and evidently preparing to go out.

"Where you bound, Doc?" asked Henry, who seldom permitted shyness to interfere with his desire for information.

The doctor's answer was solemnly given, but there was a peculiar look in his eye.

"I am going to call—professionally, of course—upon a lady named Rose," he said.

"Rose? Rose who?"

"I don't know her other name, Henry."

"You don't! Why, there's a half dozen Roses in North Ostable. Rose Barker and Rosie Nickerson, and old Mrs. Simeon Tidd—her name's Rose—no, tain't, it's Vi'let; I knew 'twas some kind of flower. But then, there's Rose Snow, Philander Snow's wife, and——"

"It's none of those, Henry. This lady's surname is Rose. I haven't the privilege of her Christian name as yet."

"Hey? . . . My thunder snakes!" as the full import of this dawned upon him. "Doctor Eph, you don't mean you're goin' up to Vasco Rose's? *That* ain't the Rose, is it?"

"Why, I believe so, Henry. A small Rose—one of the buds, I presume—came here and said his mother was sick and that his father wished me to call right away, if I was not too busy. I am not."

"Good! Thought you said you was."

"Not too busy, I mean. I am going to visit the lady."

"My thunder mighty! Doc, *don't* be crazy. Why, them Roses are the worst no-account tribe there is. I ain't sayin' nothin' against Portygees in—in the bulk, you understand—there's lots of real nice ones—but that Vas Rose gang! Why, Doctor, they'll steal the shirt off your back. They owe everybody in town, and every bill is two year past due. . . . Eh? What say?"

Nye was paying little attention. He quoted something to the effect that "the rose is sweetest washed in morning dew." Mr. Payson gasped again.

"Washed!" he protested. "Why, Doctor Eph, you don't *know* that bunch. They don't *never*—— Aw, Doc, don't go! They only sent for you 'cause Doctor Parker

won't go there no more unless he gets some money. Don't go, I tell you. You'll only be wastin' your time."

Doctor Ephraim was at the door. He smiled, in his one-sided fashion, as he stepped across the threshold. "And what a waste that would be," he observed. "I'll be back by and by, Henry. I leave you to entertain the callers."

He went. The Roses lived in a dreary shack in the woods a lengthy two miles from Bayberry Lane. Vasco, the parent masculine, was away, at work upon one of Cyrenus Stone's cranberry bogs. His castle was by no means untenanted, however, for there were "buds" innumerable, of assorted sizes and various degrees of color and raggedness. Mrs. Rose was a huge featherbed of a woman whose indisposition was due to the fact that she had tripped over a chair while chasing one of her offspring with a view to chastisement. Doctor Nye having ascertained that no serious results were likely to follow, left some simple remedies and the suggestion that she refrain from the pleasures of the chase for the immediate future.

He returned home to be cross-questioned by Mr. Payson.

"Didn't say nothin' about payin' you, did they?" the latter demanded. "No, I presume likely not. You're goin' to call again, too, ain't you? Oh, Doctor Eph, what made you go at all? You've started somethin' now, or I miss my guess."

It was soon made evident that he had not missed it. The doctor went again to the Rose shanty, and again after that. Mrs. Rose was liberal with her thanks. Her husband, grinning broadly, informed Nye that he was a

"gooda doc." "I send for you again some day maybe—huh?" he added, and announced it with the air of one conferring a favor. There was no request for the bill.

And yet from this case came others. The Roses evidently possessed the advertising instinct. Other dwellers in what Henry called "the Portygee nest" back in the woods came to consult Ephraim Nye, M. D. Some of these were, like the Roses, dirty, ragged and shiftless. Some, however, were clean, thrifty and industrious. Doctor Eph was summoned during the next month to five different families. Two of these families paid in cash for each visit, and seemed to take pride in so doing. The preponderance of weight was still heavily upon the non-paying side, but the doctor made no distinction. He was as solicitous and careful with the Mrs. Joe Gonzales' twins—second set—as with old Peter Dagona's rheumatism. And, pay or no pay, he was thoroughly enjoying these opportunities to practice his always beloved profession. He had scarcely expected to make a living. He had a little money left from his aunt's legacy and his expenses were very small. If the reserve fund gave out before the living came, why then he—but he did not worry about that. It made so little difference what happened to him, after all.

During his tramp to and from the "Portygees' nest," he met some of his fellow townsfolk, male or female. All of them he of course knew, some had in the old days called themselves friends of his. He made it a practice when meeting one of them for the first time to bow and bid him or her a good morning or good afternoon. He found cynical amusement in watching them writhe. Most did writhe, that is, they looked very much embarrassed,

mumbled something or other and hurried on. Some did not speak at all. One or two returned the greeting and added a perfunctory "Howdy do?" None bade him welcome or said he or she was glad to see him. Why should they? He knew he was not welcome and no one—except Bearse and Payson—was glad to see him. All of which, he tried to believe, troubled him not at all. He had foreseen it; it was a part of the bargain he had made with himself. And no one was given the opportunity to snub him a second time.

He met his brother-in-law occasionally. Judge Copeland's bow was coldly distant and they exchanged no words. Once, soon after the Judge's visit to the Dillingham place, Nye saw Faith Copeland pass. She was walking briskly along one of the wood paths, her Chow dog on a leash. He, looking from the windows of the Gonzales shanty, saw and recognized her. She had changed greatly, had become a young woman. A good-looking, healthy, clear-eyed young woman, with the Copeland family likeness strong upon her. She resembled her father—and some one else. Doctor Eph walked home with knitted brow and his lips tightly set. Henry Ward Beecher Payson could not get him to talk at supper time that evening, and only when Captain Mark came to play checkers did he shake off what Henry termed his "gloom fit." He did not see Faith again for some time. Captain Mark said she had gone back to boarding school for her final term there.

The second week in May brought him his first non-Portygee patient. And, as a preliminary, he renewed an acquaintance. It was a Sunday morning, and he was taking what Henry called his "constitoodinal" and Captain Mark his "deck pacer." As it was a particularly fine

morning, his walk was through the fields and along the edge of the sandy bluffs overlooking Ostable harbor, the long stretch of salt marshes, and the bay beyond. The sky was blue, the new grass was springing green beneath his feet, the gulls were screeching happily upon the beach below, and behind him, in the village, the church bells were summoning the godly to worship. His thoughts had been, for him, almost pleasant until those bells began.

Suddenly, through the moody reverie into which their singing had plunged him, came other sounds. Behind him some one was calling, shouting his name.

"Doctor! Doctor Nye!"

He turned. Across the field at his rear a person on a bicycle was approaching. Over—or through—the soft lichen and "poverty grass" which carpeted the barren hilltops, the rider was—as Captain Mark might have said, "making heavy weather of it." As Nye turned to look, this person took a hand from the handlebar—a risky venture considering everything—and waved it.

"Hi, Doctor!" he hailed once more. "Doctor Nye! hold on a minute."

The advice to hold on would, it appeared, have been more applicable to himself, for at that moment the forward wheel of the bicycle slipped in a patch of soft moss and machine and rider went over in a heap. The doctor turned and walked back. Before he reached the scene of the spill its victim was on his feet and brushing the particles of damp vegetation from the legs of his trousers. He was a young man, broad-shouldered and brown, and there was about him an undefinably familiar something which caused Nye to feel that he should recognize him.

He did not, however. If he had ever known him, he certainly did not now.

"Not hurt, are you?" asked the doctor, as he came up.

The young fellow grinned broadly, a pleasant grin in a wholesome pleasant face.

"My pride is dented a little, that's all," he observed. "Served me right, of course, but that never helps much. How do you do, Doctor Nye? Glad to see you."

He held out his hand. If he realized how unorthodox that proffered handshake and his greeting were when applied to the man before him, he did not make the realization apparent. Nye regarded him keenly, looking for some sign of charitable condescension. Then he took the hand.

"How do you do?" he said.

The young man waited a moment; then he declared, "I don't believe you know who I am."

Doctor Eph shook his head. "I am afraid I don't," he admitted. "I think I should, because—because——"

"Because you used to. But that was a good while ago and I've grown some since. I'm Tom Stone."

Was it possible! Eleven years before there had been a fifteen-year-old boy who used to play football on the Ostable high school team. Once he twisted his knee and the doctor kept him at home with the injured leg stretched out upon a couch for two long weeks at the beginning of the season. During the convalescence he talked football with the boy and the latter discovered that the man who was his loathed jailor had played end upon his varsity team. After that there was no more loathing, and when the knee was cured the doctor occasionally came down to the school yard and helped with the coaching. The

Ostable high school that year won the county championship and it was the trick play taught by Doctor Ephraim Nye which beat Orham and gave Tom Stone the captaincy. Two years later Tom went away to Tech. Nye had not seen him since.

And now that self-conscious, gangling country boy was a man, big, easy, self-possessed. Was it possible? Cyrenus Stone was right; in spite of his own experience that Time dragged interminably, apparently it did fly with normal people—in normal places.

"Remember me now, don't you, Doctor?" asked young Stone.

Doctor Ephraim's reply cleared away all doubt as to the remembrance. "I am mighty glad to see you, Tom," he declared. "And I'm ashamed of myself for not recognizing you at once."

Tom smiled. "No reason why you should," he said. "I was a kid when you saw me last, and a fellow changes a lot in ten years. You have changed, too, Doctor."

Doctor Eph smiled now, but his smile was not over mirthful. "I suppose so," he observed. Then, noting the flush of embarrassment upon Stone's face, he added, quickly, "But never mind the changes. It is good to see you again, Tom. How are you and what are you doing down here?"

Tom was still somewhat flustered.

"Why—why, I am going to be at home for a year or so," he stammered. "I'm in charge of—well, you see, they are going to build a bridge over at Denboro, and——"

"And you are handling the job. I remember now; your father told me. Good enough! It will be the right

sort of bridge when it is done, if you can drive workmen the way you used to run a football team. You are a full-fledged engineer now, aren't you? How do you like it?"

"First rate, thanks. Of course I'm scared half to death at the idea of tackling this thing on my own responsibility. It's my first single-handed job, you know. However, I'm going to try darned hard."

"You'll pull it off. How does it seem to be at home again?"

"Seems good. Or it would if—and that reminds me. Doctor Nye, I was chasing you just now. I called at the house—your place—and Henry Payson said you had gone for a walk. Said to hunt in this direction and perhaps I'd find you. I want you to come over to the house and see mother. She isn't well, and we're all rather worried. Can you come—now?"

Nye hesitated. Cyrenus had mentioned his wife's ill health, but he had also spoken of Doctor Parker in connection with the case. Upon one point Doctor Ephraim had been determined before coming back to Ostable; he would not, unless forced to do so, take away a patient from his fellow physician. The latter had ignored him utterly since his arrival in town, but that made no difference.

So he hesitated. Tom Stone regarded him anxiously. "You will come, won't you?" he asked. "I told mother I knew you would. You used to be our doctor, you remember."

Nye nodded. He had been the doctor in a great many families, the members of which for the most part no longer spoke to him.

"I supposed—in fact, your father intimated that Doctor Parker was attending Mrs. Stone," he said.

"Well, he was. But he isn't any more. He and father have had a row." Then, with his broad smile, he added, "There is nothing unusual in that, for dad rows with lots of people. But I think he's right this time. Parker has been treating mother for almost a month and she isn't any better. I think she is worse. Parker and dad had it out yesterday, and dad told him to go—well, he told him, all right."

"I see. But what did Parker say?"

"Oh, he said several things. They never did get on very well. He is a great friend of Judge Copeland's, and you know what that means in our family."

"But, see here, Tom, I don't like to interfere with another man's case."

"It isn't his case any longer, and it won't be. If you won't take it, father will call Doctor Hayes from Denboro. But when I suggested you, he was agreeable."

"Agreeable?"

"Well, he said I could give you a try, if I wanted to."

"Was that all he said?"

"No-o, not exactly. You know dad. But he is willing you should come, and mother wants you. She says you were the best doctor she ever had anything to do with, and she doesn't see any reason why you shouldn't be as good now as you ever were."

"Humph!"

"Oh, come, Doctor Nye, do! I told her I knew you would and that I knew you could cure her. You're the best doctor on Cape Cod and always were. I'm banking on you. *Won't* you come?"

The doctor pondered a moment longer. Then he nodded.

"I'll come, Tom," he said. "Give me time enough to get my bag, and I'll come right over. But you mustn't bank, as you call it, too heavily on me. I'll do my best, that's all."

"That's enough. I'll walk back with you after the bag and we'll go home together. Good stuff! Mother'll be all right now, and I know it."

Doctor Nye was less inclined to share the young man's optimism after his call at the Stone home. Cyrenus's dwelling was a good-sized, rambling house of many rooms, most of which were unoccupied but in apple-pie order, thanks to Mrs. Stone, who did her own housework. Her husband could easily have afforded servants, but would not employ them, as a matter of principle.

"Sophrony and I don't want any hired girls loafin' around the kitchen and peddlin' gossip all over town," he declared. "She got along all right without 'em when we didn't have money enough to pay their wages, and we get along just as well now when we've got a couple of dollars in the bank. I don't keep hired help for the same reason I don't run an automobile. About every place in town that has a mortgage on it has a car in the barn and a hired girl asleep on the back steps. I figure to keep my property clear of all three. A self-respectin' man has got to be careful these days."

There were mortgages not a few in Cyrenus's safe, but they brought him interest instead of taking it from him.

Mrs. Stone's ill health, however, had caused him to break, or at least compromise with, his declaration of independence. Marietta Lamb was "coming in by the day"

now, and she opened the door for Tom and the doctor. Her expression when she beheld the latter was thoroughly orthodox in its shocked disapproval.

Sophronia Stone was lying upon a sofa in the sitting room. It was only within the week that she had consented to yield to her indisposition even to this extent. She bade Doctor Nye a brisk good morning.

"There isn't a mite of sense in draggin' you over here," she declared. "I'm just out of sorts, that's all, and I ought to be ashamed of myself for layin' here. But nothin' would do Tom but to have you come. There's nothin' really the matter with me more than laziness, I guess. Doctor Parker called it malaria, but he didn't seem very certain, and Cyrenus and he never did get along, so perhaps it's just as well he's gone. For mercy sakes, Doctor Nye, give me somethin' so I can get out to that kitchen and see how many dishes that 'Mary's lamb' has smashed. Hirin' her is more of Tom's foolishness."

Her eyes were bright—almost too bright—so the doctor thought—and her face was flushed and her pulse rapid. Her temperature, so the thermometer disclosed, was a degree above normal.

"I'm pretty good now," she said, "except for my back achin' so. It is in the afternoons that I seem to get worse."

Questioning brought out the fact that she had been indisposed for several weeks. The present week was the worst of all.

"I don't believe it's malaria," she declared, "and I told Doctor Parker so. What in the world would give me malaria around here?"

Doctor Ephraim did not know. Malaria was by no

means common in Ostable. That afternoon he called again, found the fever higher, and the patient complaining of headache and backache. A suspicion, already formed in his mind, became stronger.

Two days later he took Cyrenus Stone and his son aside and broke the news to them.

"Your wife has typhoid, Mr. Stone," he said. "I guessed as much and the blood test confirms it. She has been coming down with it for some time—walking typhoid, it is commonly called."

It took much to break Cyrenus Stone's calm. It was broken now, however. His thin-lipped, rugged face went white.

"Good God!" he exclaimed. "She—she ain't goin' to die, is she?"

"No. Not if we can help it. But she must be put to bed at once and kept there. You must have a nurse, probably two."

Cyrenus gasped. "Typhoid!" he cried. "Why—why—and that Parker called it malaria. I'll—I'll kill him."

His son put in a word. "No, no, you won't, dad," he said. "I'll get the nurses, Doctor, somehow. Or will you get them for us?"

Doctor Eph shook his head. He had already considered that matter.

"You had better get them, Tom," he answered. "Try the hospital at Wapatomac. And it might be as well not to mention my name in connection with the case."

"Why not?" demanded Cyrenus.

"Well, you see, I—my reputation is——"

"Reputation! What do you mean by that? You're a doctor, ain't you?"

"Yes, I am a doctor, but—well, I have been in prison, and, of course," quietly, "that fact influences many people. I want your wife to have the best nurses obtainable."

Stone looked troubled. "Humph!" he grunted. "That's so. See here, Nye, if you think your—well, if you think that—that business of yours is liable to make it harder for Sophrony to get the right kind of help, maybe—maybe——"

He hesitated. Nye finished the sentence for him. "Maybe you had better call some other doctor, you were going to say," he observed. "Perhaps you had. But you must decide now, for if I do take this case, I shall go through with it. I want that understood."

"Well—well, hang it all, Eph, I—I——"

Tom broke in.

"Shut up, dad!" he ordered. "Of course we want you, Doctor Nye. Mother wants you, I want you, and so does father; he is frightened, that's all."

"I know, Tom, but let's look at this thing straight. Your mother is going to be sick, very sick, and for a long time. There will be a lot of talk and criticism at the best. At the worst—and there is always a chance for the worst—things will be said that—well, you know as well as I do."

Tom declared that he did not care what was said. His father did not say anything for the moment. Then he seized Nye by the shoulder and spun him around to look in his face.

"Eph Nye," he said, "you always was a good doctor, the best one around here; all hands said so. I—I used to swear by you and so did Sophrony. She—she—well, she and I have been together for—for—— Oh, hang it, man,

if you take a hold of this, will you promise me you'll do everything in the Lord's world to pull her through? Will you?"

"Of course he will, dad."

"I wasn't askin' you. You keep still. I'm askin' him. Will you?"

"Certainly."

Another pause. Then Cyrenus drew a long breath. "Go ahead then," he commanded, "and—and don't you spare a dollar where it's needed. You hear me."

If the population of Ostable could have heard him they would scarcely have believed their ears. When Doctor Nye left that house, after seeing his patient safely in bed and her son on the way to Wapatomac on his quest for nurses, Cyrenus asked another question.

"Typhoid fever!" he exclaimed, fearfully. "Typhoid fever! There ain't been a case of it around here for years. *Where* on earth did she catch it from?"

Nye shook his head. "I don't know," he replied. "But I'm going to try hard to find out."

CHAPTER VI

MRS. STONE'S illness developed rapidly and became what Doctor Nye and the nurses called a "good" case of typhoid, meaning one, serious enough of itself, but fortunately without complications. The nurses were obtained from the hospital at Wapatomac and proved satisfactory. Marietta Lamb, after showing herself possessed of the true business instinct by demanding an extra two dollars a week and threatening to leave unless she received it, consented to continue coming in by the day and doing the Stone housework. Cyrenus ceased to walk the floor of his sitting room and, convinced that his wife was in good hands and that nothing more than was being done to insure a favorable outcome of her illness could be done by him or any other mortal, tried to distract his mind during the inevitable wait before the crisis by keeping busy with his various interests about town. His son spent the days at Denboro preparing for the bridge building. His evenings, some of them, he spent at the Dillingham place, chatting with Doctor Eph, or watching the checker games between the latter and Captain Mark Bearse.

These games had become, as they had been in the old days, a regular feature of the weekly routine. Promptly at eight o'clock on certain evenings a clamorous clatter and snorting heralded the approach of the Bearse "flivver" and Henry Ward Beecher Payson, hearing the disturb-

ance, proceeded to clear the sitting room table and place thereon the checker board and checkers. Then Captain Mark appeared, talking. He usually began to talk before he got inside the door; he was, as his sister would have said, "possessed of the notion" that his friend was despondent and needed cheering up, and that conversation upon almost any topic, a lot of conversation, was the best form of cheer. So he talked much, and the doctor talked a little, and both smoked and played checkers.

Tom Stone, when he came, listened and watched and found amusement and temporary relief from anxiety concerning his mother.

The captain was usually freighted with the village news and gossip.

"Glory!" he exclaimed one evening, as he pulled his chair up to the table and reached for the tobacco jar and the matches. "You know what I heard to-day, Eph?"

The doctor shook his head. Captain Mark did not seem to expect an answer, at any rate he did not wait for one, but went on:

"I heard that you and Cyrenus was as good as satisfied," he said, "that you knew where Sophrony's typhoid came from."

Nye looked up from his pipe filling.

"Did you?" he observed. "That's interesting. Where did it come from?"

"Well, accordin' to the yarn, you and Cyrenus think she got it from the milk Heman Paine's been sellin' her."

The doctor selected a match. "That is more interesting still," he said. "Who told you; Heman?"

The captain grinned. "Heman!" he repeated. "I should say not. I told the feller that said it that I was goin' to

ask Heman about it, and he spent the next half hour beggin' me not to. 'Twas Shubal Bush that told me, and he got it from Frankie-George Hammond, and Frankie-George got it from somebody else, and so on. But Shubal he was all het up about it. Seems he and Angelina had been takin' milk of Heman up to a month ago, then they changed over to Jonathan Tubman. Shubal he declared that that Paine milk had a funny taste to it, and he wondered if it was the typhoid he tasted. What do you think of that? Ho, ho!

"And one mornin', Shubal says," continued Captain Mark, "he and Angie found somethin' in the milk jar that settled them so far as tradin' with Heman was concerned. He wouldn't say what it was."

Henry, who still lingered by the door, grunted disdainfully, "I cal'late 'twas the bill," he observed. "That bill wasn't settled, and hadn't been for over three months. Heman said he told Shubal that his cows wan't givin' the milk of human kindness and that it took money to feed 'em so they'd give the other kind. Shubal Bush! Bah!"

"But there's no truth in the milk yarn, is there, Doctor?" queried Bearse.

Doctor Eph shook his head. "No," he replied. Henry grunted again.

"Course there ain't," he declared. "If there was any hope of typhoid in Heman Paine's milk, Shubal wouldn't have give it up, even if he did have to pay for it. Not so long as his wife's Aunt Lindy is stoppin' with 'em, he wouldn't. Old lady Pepper's got money and a strong constitution. Shubal won't get a cent of the cash so long as the health lasts, you can bet on that."

"But have you got any idea of where Sophrony's typhoid did come from?" asked Captain Mark.

"Nothing conclusive," replied Doctor Nye.

To Tom Stone, however, when alone with that young gentleman, he was less reticent.

"Tom," he said, "your father tells me that you have had trouble with the driven well in your house and have been, up to last week, getting water from the old well down in the hollow behind the barn."

Tom nodded. "Yes," he said. "That is good water in the old well. Cold as ice. Father put in the engine and the new well three years ago. Before that we always used the old well. As a boy one of my regular jobs was drawing water by the bucketful and lugging it up the hill to the house. On Monday morning, wash day, I used to fill all the tubs and the hogshead in the rough room behind the kitchen. That old well has given me many a backache."

"Hum. Well, I'm not sure that it isn't responsible for your mother's backache."

"What do you mean? Mother didn't bring up the water. Vasco Rose did that. Father hired him to do it every morning before he went to his other work."

"I don't mean that bringing the water was responsible. I mean the water itself. I don't like that water. I am suspicious of it."

Tom was greatly surprised. "You mean that the water from that old well gave mother the typhoid fever?" he demanded, incredulously. "Oh, come, Doctor Nye, that isn't possible! My grandfather dug that well. Our family has used that water for years and years. Up to three

years ago we didn't drink any other. It never made anybody sick."

"How do you know it didn't? Your grandfather died of inflammation of the bowels, so your father said. He died forty-odd years ago, and was sick for a long time. In those days a good many intestinal diseases were labeled 'inflammation.' I'm not so sure. I have had a sample of that water analyzed."

"And it showed typhoid germs?"

"No-o, not exactly. If it had I should be absolutely certain. It did show a good many impurities and was full of bits of decayed vegetation. That old well is down in the hollow by the creek where the cattle drink. The creek drains out of that swamp beyond."

"Yes, and the swamp empties into the biggest, cleanest pond around here. Hallett's Pond, a mile back in the woods, where we boys used to skate. Hallett's Pond is the clearest, finest water in the township. Everybody says so. Why, if ever Ostable has a town water supply, Hallett's Pond will be the source of it. I have heard that talked about ever since I can remember. Father himself used to talk about it until he heard that Judge Copeland was doing the same thing; then," with a rather rueful smile, "of course he made fun of the idea. If you want dad to oppose anything, just tell him the Judge is for it, that's all. But, honestly, Doctor, I can't believe that old well is responsible for mother's illness. Why haven't the rest of us been sick?"

"Perhaps you were not in a condition to encourage the germ. Mrs. Stone, I understand, has been tired and ailing for months. Ten people may take a germ into their systems, and only the eleventh will be affected by it."

"But that water is so cold. It tastes so good."

Nye looked doubtful. "Somebody wrote something, I believe," he said, "about 'the poison and sting of things too sweet.' At any rate, don't you use that water again, any of you. Your father has promised to board up the well, and I am glad of it."

Young Stone was still skeptical. "I'll promise, of course," he said. "But that water has been—a—a sort of symbol of purity in our house. If we can't drink that I don't know what is safe to drink."

Henry Ward Beecher Payson came in just then and the doctor turned to him.

"Henry," he said, "we have been having a discussion about water. Tom here believes, with Apemantus, in 'honest water, which ne'er left man in the mire.' What do you think of it?"

Mr. Payson looked suspicious. "Abe who?" he demanded. "Who's he; more Shakespeare?"

"Why, yes, he is this time, as it happens."

"Humph! I cal'lated likely he was. Water never left no man in the mire, eh? I want to know! Mire's mud, ain't it? If it wasn't for water there wouldn't *be* no mire. I don't see much mud made out of whisky—not these times, anyhow."

The typhoid fever reached its crisis in due season and that crisis was safely passed. Mrs. Stone began slowly to regain health and strength. The anxiety of her husband and son relaxed and hope took the place of dread. North Ostable found other subjects for discussion and speculation. At Miss Bemis's when the sewing circle met and at the post office during the mail sorting, the question as to whether or not Sophronia would recover was superseded

by the rumors concerning the date of opening of the hotel and the arrival of summer cottagers. Doctor Ephraim Nye and his brazen effrontery in returning to the scene of his wickedness were by no means exhausted as themes, but they were kept more in the background. It was generally agreed that Cyrenus Stone had been "stark crazy" to give up the professional services of Doctor Parker and employ those of a jailbird, but—prophecies of death for Mrs. Stone and tardy repentance for her husband having proven false—the opinion now was that Cyrenus had been luckier than he deserved.

"I don't know who is responsible," observed Miss Althea Bemis at circle meeting. "Some say it was those trained nurses from the Wapatomac hospital. Marietta Lamb goes around hintin' that if Sophrony had had as good cookin' before she was taken down sick as she got afterwards, she might not have been sick at all. Course I don't pay much attention to *that,* for everybody knows Marietta; but——"

"Yes, and everybody knows her cookin'," put in Mrs. Hammond, Frankie-George's wife, with sinister emphasis.

"I thought folks with typhoid fever couldn't eat anything," said Angelina Bush. "That bein' the case, I don't see how cookin', Marietta's or anybody else's, would make much difference."

Mrs. Hammond nodded. "It would have made consider'ble if Sophrony *had* ate it," she snapped. "Do you remember that cake Marietta baked for the supper at the Eastern Star buildin' corner stone layin'? You heard what Mark Bearse said about it, didn't you? He started to hand it and the trowel to the minister; made believe he

thought it was the corner stone. My, but Marietta was mad!"

There was more discussion, much more, but Miss Bemis summed it up when she said: "Anyhow, Cyrenus hasn't helped his reputation in this town much, by hirin' Ephraim Nye. And nobody *but* Cyrenus would have done it. And if you want to know why he did it, I guess likely I could tell you. He did it to spite Judge Copeland. Flyin' in the face of Providence, I call it, and I took pains to tell that Nye so, too."

There was a general stir and murmur of admiring surprise.

"You did!" cried Mrs. Bush. "Do you mean you said that right out to Doctor Nye, Althy?"

"Well—well, not to him, himself, of course. I don't demean myself by doin' much talkin' to *him,* I hope. But I said it where I knew 'twould be carried right to him. I told it to that good for nothin' scamp of a Henry Payson."

Every one was, naturally, a little disappointed. Mrs. Hammond wished to know if Henry had seen fit to reply.

"Nothin' but what you'd expect," sniffed Miss Althea. "Just saucy and irreverent he was, same as usual. Wanted to know if I thought the Judge and Providence looked as much alike as all that."

So, after all, the doctor's success with the Stone case brought him little or no additional popularity or prosperity. He had won the gratitude of Cyrenus, of course, and Cyrenus Stone was a man of influence, when he chose to use it. But Nye made no effort to have that influence exerted in any way. His manner was the same toward the Stones as toward the rest of Ostable's population, Captain Mark and Henry excepted. He was quiet, aloof, non-

communicative. He visited his few patients, he took his daily walks, he sat alone in his living room and smoked and read. If Payson attempted to repeat the village gossip to him, he paid little attention. For the greater part of the time even Henry could not lure him into extended conversation.

He had made, however, one friend in spite of himself. Tom Stone refused to be snubbed or ignored. He continued to visit the Dillingham place, and the fact that the doctor never asked him to come again and very often said less than a dozen words the whole evening had no visible effect. That it had some effect, however, was made plain upon an evening when Tom himself referred to it.

Nye was in one of his silent moods. Tom's attempts at conversation had received almost no encouragement. At last the young fellow leaned forward and spoke what was in his heart.

"Look here, Doctor Nye," he demanded, "don't you like me?"

Doctor Eph looked up. "Yes," he said

"You do? Honest?"

"Yes."

"But you don't like to have me come here to see you, do you?"

"I like to see you very much. I think you shouldn't come here as much as you do."

"Why?"

"You know why."

"No, I don't. I like to come. I—I—why, confound it, you're about the only man I can talk to in this place—except dad, of course; talk about anything big or worth while, I mean. I came down here to-night to tell you

about my bridge—" in the habit of young engineers Tom was already referring to Denboro's new trestle work as a personal possession. "I've got to tell *some*body."

The doctor smiled. "Well," he said, "I rather think almost anybody would be glad to listen."

"Listen! Yes. But I want them to ask questions."

"Well, unless the crowd at the post office have changed much in ten years, they will oblige in that way, I should imagine."

"Bosh! Do you suppose I want to answer Shubal Bush's questions?"

"All Ostable isn't populated with Shubals. There are others."

"Who?"

Nye named a dozen men of prominence within the town limits. His caller dismissed them all as undesirables. "They wouldn't be interested," he declared. "Besides, most of them are prejudiced against father. Judge Copeland now, he—well, he is a fine man, but he and dad hate each other."

The doctor was a little surprised by the tone in which this was uttered; there was a note of regret in it which was unexpected.

"That is too bad," he said.

"Yes, *I* think it is. . . . But there," changing the subject suddenly, "that doesn't count now. Why don't you want to have me come here, Doctor Nye? You say you like me. You bet I like you! Always did. And now you've saved mother's life. I can't understand what reason——"

He paused, having caught the doctor's eye. He reddened, stammered, and seemed to find the going hard.

Nye's faint smile was in evidence as he said, "I guess you know the reason why you shouldn't come here now, Tom."

Stone's face was crimson. "Why—why, hang it all," he blurted, "I suppose—well, I guess I do know what you mean. You—you think people will—will—— What in blazes do I care what loafers like Shubal and Frankie-George say? Do you suppose I care about—about—I don't believe it, anyhow. I never did believe it. And it doesn't make any difference. I'm going to come here to see you as often as I like. As often as you'll let me, at any rate. I *am!*"

He thumped the table so violently that the lampshade sprang from its frame. Doctor Eph put it straight again.

"I'm glad you feel that way, Tom," he observed. "You're a good boy. . . . Oh, not a boy any more, I know that, except in comparison with antiques like myself."

"You're not old. Dad says you're a good way south of forty."

"Am I? Well, it doesn't seem possible. And it doesn't matter. The fact is, Tom, that you should be careful, you ought to be. And if you're not I must be for you. . . . Oh, well, you're here to-night, aren't you? Go ahead and tell me about your bridge."

So Tom told him and, in spite of discouragements on the doctor's part, came again and again, as often as twice a week, to tell more and to talk of plans and hopes and ambitions for the future. Nye listened, was interested, and, listening, forgot for a few hours the wreck of his own hopes and plans.

May slipped by, June came. Summer houses began to open, new faces appeared along the Ostable sidewalks, the

number of motor cars upon the Ostable roads grew greater. One of these cars was brand new, a glittering and smart affair which attracted attention not only of itself, but because of the personality of its driver. Henry Ward Beecher Payson, setting the table for a Sunday morning breakfast, made proclamation concerning it. Henry was to have a part of the day off. A friend of his from "up to the Center," so he said, had invited him to go for a ride over toward Wapatomac. Mr. Payson was, therefore, arrayed in his Sunday best, including the cork leg.

"You know what I see last night?" inquired Henry, bringing in the baked beans from the kitchen. "Hey? Do you, Doctor Eph?"

The doctor shook his head, but said nothing. Henry was disappointed.

"You don't seem over and above excited to find out, I'd say," he observed, pointedly.

His employer put down the Saturday Evening *Transcript.*

"I imagine there may be more excitement in what you see to-night," he said. "Who is this friend who is taking you to ride to-day?"

Payson pretended not to hear. "I was at the post office waitin' for the mail," he said, "and I heard——"

"Wait a minute. Who is taking you to ride?"

"Why—why, a friend of mine, that's all. A feller I've known ever since I can remember, pretty nigh. Him and I are——"

"What is his name?"

"Name? Why, his name is—is——"

"Batchelder, isn't it?"

Henry seemed embarrassed. "Why—why, yes," he admitted. "That's who 'tis. Bluey Batchelder. You know him, Doc. Bluey's one of the old-timers. I've known Bluey ever since——"

"So you said. He was with you the night you slept under the freight car, I believe."

Henry strenuously denied it. "Oh, no, he wasn't," he declared. "You're wrong there, Doctor. You ain't often wrong, I will give in, but you be this time. Bluey wan't with me that night—that is, only part of it—the—the first part. I left him—I left him at—seems to me 'twas—well, I don't remember where 'twas exactly, but I know I left him, anyhow; or he left me, or somethin'. He wan't with me when they backed that freight car over my leg. No, no! Bluey wasn't responsible for that, not a mite."

"And he owns this automobile you're going to ride in?"

"No. Who said so? It's one he's goin' to borrow. He don't own no auto, Bluey don't. He's a poor workin' man, same as I am."

"His work is poor, if that's what you mean. Look here, Henry, if you take my advice you won't go to Wapatomac with him."

"Well, I—I've kind of promised, you understand, and —and—?"

"All right. But look out for your leg, that's all."

Mr. Payson reflected. "I cal'late," he observed, after a moment, "that maybe I will shift over to my wooden one. Cork legs cost money. What you grinnin' about, Doc?"

A few minutes later he referred again to the subject with which he had begun the conversation. "I ain't told you yet what I see down to the post office last night," he

said. "I see that new car Dan Copeland give his daughter for a graduation present. She was pilotin' it, too. Pretty slick craft, that car is, don't talk! I'd heard about it afore. Jonathan Beasley was goin' on about it, how much it cost, and the like of that. Jonathan's one of the Copeland congregation, always bowin' down and worshippin' the Judge and all his works. Faith, she come into the office and Jonathan commenced to fire salutes to her with his face, same as he always does, and pretty soon we all went out to see the new auto. It's a jim-dandy. One of them—er—Cacklers—or Packin's or somethin'. She looks pretty swell aboard it, too. Nice lookin' girl, Faith is, apple of the Judge's heart, as the sayin' goes. I——"

He went on to expatiate upon the charms of the new car and its owner. Doctor Nye learned that Miss Faith —it seemed strange to remember that she was his niece and in the old days had called him "Uncle Eph" and loved to climb upon his knee and beg for stories—he learned that she had finished her final year at boarding school and had come back to live at Ostable with her father "until some other feller carries her off," as Henry put it. The car was a present from the Judge, given her on Commencement Day.

"You'll see it pretty soon, Doctor," declared Payson. "She's runnin' it all over the county these days. It's new, you see, and a new broom gathers no dust—moss—well, you know what I mean, Doctor Eph."

Nye saw the car that very afternoon. He was returning from his round of visits—a short round it was—when Faith Copeland passed him. She was driving at a rapid rate and his eye caught but a momentary picture

of flashing nickel and polish and of a slight figure at the wheel, a girlish figure, with bright eyes and rosy cheeks, and hair whipped by the breeze. Most people would have found it a charming picture and have turned to look again. He did not. When he returned to the Dillingham house he was glad to find that Henry had already gone upon his Wapatomac excursion. If Payson had been there he would have talked and Ephraim Nye did not wish to talk or to listen. Nor did he wish to think the thoughts which the sight of his niece had brought back to him, but these he could not dismiss nor control. There were times when this self-imposed martyrdom of his seemed to be the most foolish and unnecessary mistake of a life made up of mistakes.

He read for a while, took another walk, came back and prepared a meal, ate little or nothing of it, washed the few dishes, moped about the empty dismal rooms, took up the discarded book and tried once more to read. And from his reading he was aroused by a shriek in the road without, a grinding of brakes, a roaring, splintering crash, and then a succession of shrieks and outcries.

He dropped the book and ran to the window. His first impression of the scene without was of a great cloud of yellow dust; the next that something was missing, a section of the Dillingham fence; also that the small silver-leaf tree by the gate was strangely out of the perpendicular; that some one was screaming—screaming; and then that, from out the dust was emerging a black something, a shape with wheels, spinning, an overturned motor car, with——

He darted from the house. The dust had not entirely settled when he reached the place where the gate had been.

Gate, fence and car were in a tangled heap of wood, leather, metal, and broken glass. The car was on its side, its base and wheels toward him, and slightly elevated upon the little bank at the edge of the sidewalk. He ran around to the other side, and, stooping, peered in under the top. Then he stooped still lower and began to work, gently but swiftly.

Some one was pawing at his arm. He turned impatiently to see Miss Althea Bemis, white-faced and shaking.

"Oh, my Lordy!" groaned Miss Althea. "Oh, my Lordy!"

"See if you can pull that cushion out of the way," ordered Doctor Nye.

Miss Althea wrung her hands. "Oh, my Lordy!" she wailed again.

"That cushion!" shouted the doctor. The shout had no effect whatever; the Bemis hands were wrung, but they were not used for any other purpose. Some one else spoke.

"Can't I do anything?" this person said. Nye did not turn this time. "Yes," he answered. "Lift that cushion from her head."

The cushion was lifted and the doctor very gently dragged from beneath it and the ruins of the broken windshield a young woman, whether living or dead he was not yet sure. Yes, she was alive, but unconscious. Her hair had been thrown about her face and partially covered it.

"Is she killed?" wailed Miss Althea, still pawing at his arm. "Oh, my Lordy, doctor, is she killed dead? Is she?"

"I don't know," he snapped hastily. "No—no, she isn't. Will you help me lift her? . . . That's it. . . . Easy. . . . Thanks."

The person who was helping was not Miss Bemis, but the other, she who had aided with the cushion. Nye recognized her. She was a young woman from the Portuguese colony in the woods. One of the Rose "tribe," a niece of old Vasco's. She was very pale and she was crying, but she helped, nevertheless.

"I'm going to take her into the house," said the doctor. "Can you——" Then, as the thought came to him, "Wait! There is no one else under there, is there?"

"No," said the young woman.

"Then come with me. I want you."

She hesitated. "My—my baby," she faltered. Doctor Eph was suddenly aware that a child was shrieking wildly.

"Your baby?" he repeated. "Your baby wasn't hurt, was it?"

"No. . . . No. . . . He—the baby run across the road and—and the car would run over it. Then she turn the car out of the road and—and *this!* . . . Oh, my gar! . . . Yes, yes, *yes,* YES!" to the child, a three-year-old youngster, who was clawing at her skirts and bellowing. "Stop! Be still! . . . Wait! . . . Here," turning to the pallid Althea, "You take him! Joe," to the child, "you stay with the pretty lady. Mother come back right away. . . . *Hush!* . . . Now, doctor, you take her in."

She ran ahead and held open the door. Nye strode up the walk, through the dining room and into the living room, where he laid his burden upon the shabby sofa. Then he brushed back the hair from the white face and stooped to examine it. He uttered an exclamation.

The girl upon the sofa was his niece, Faith Copeland.

CHAPTER VII

THE Portuguese woman who had opened the door, followed him into the sitting room. Now she spoke:

"Doctor," she said.

Nye did not hear her. He was bending over the sofa. She tried again.

"Doctor," she repeated.

He turned to look at her. His own face was as white as that of the unconscious girl. "Eh? Yes?" he queried.

"She die; eh?"

"What? . . . I don't know. Don't bother me now."

"Doctor?"

"Yes, yes," impatiently. "Don't bother me."

"What I do now?"

"Do? Nothing. . . . Wait!"

He began to make a hasty examination. Outside the house a murmur of voices was steadily growing louder, there were shouts, exclamations, outcries. Steps sounded in the yard, in the dining room. The woman—her name was Gaspard—spoke again.

"Sshh! Sshh!" she hissed. "Don't come in here. You wait."

Nye looked up. The doorway was crowded with faces. The Gaspard woman, with arms extended, was barring the entrance. Over her shoulders peered the faces, open-mouthed, pale or flushed, morbidly excited. Mr. Bush's face was there, also Beasley's and those of

the nearest neighbors. As the doctor turned in their direction there was a chorus of questions and exclamations.

"Doctor——"

"Godfreys, ain't it dreadful?"

"Is she killed, Doc?"

"What——?"

"Hush!" continued Doctor Ephraim.

"But, Doctor, what you goin' to do? What——?"

"You—you Beasley, you shut up!" commanded Mrs. Gaspard, waving her hooked fingers within an inch of the speaker's nose. The Beasley head was jerked out of danger so promptly that its rear collided with the nose of another citizen in the crowd. A fervent "What in time you doin' of?" was wrung from the agonized owner of this second nose. Jonathan tried to explain and the uproar swelled.

"Get them out of here," ordered Doctor Nye.

Mrs. Gaspard got them out. She threw herself bodily —and she was no featherweight—against the front rank. As it gave she expedited matters by stamping violently upon the foremost toes. Then she slammed the door and threw her weight against that.

"There, by gar!" she exclaimed, puffing. "They go, I guess, eh? . . . You stay outside, big fools!" she added, at the top of her lungs.

The uproar in the dining room was but slightly muffled. Beneath the sitting room window shades were rows of peering eyes.

"What we do next, Doc?" inquired Mrs. Gaspard.

"Send some one for Doctor Parker. Some one with a car, if possible. Who is out there?"

"Eh? Everybody. All hands. And more comin'. . . . Wait, I look!"

She opened the door a crack and peeped out.

"Sshh! Go 'way!" she screamed, addressing those without. Then, for the doctor's benefit, she began to catalogue the throng.

"Joe Beasley . . . Miss Beasley . . . Old Bush . . . Sam Doane . . . Tim Black . . . Jimmie Black . . . Sarah Newcomb . . . Philander Newcomb . . . All the Newcombs. . . ."

She was interrupted. The babble in the dining room grew suddenly louder. There were more exclamations, groans, protests, mingled with commands in a masculine voice.

"Let me through! Clear the way!"

Mrs. Gaspard exclaimed. "Cap'n Mark Bearse, he come," she said.

The doctor turned his head.

"Mark!" he exclaimed. "Good! Tell him to come here. I want him."

Captain Mark, breathless, fought his way into the room. He looked at his friend and at the still form upon the sofa.

"Good God, Eph!" he groaned. "This is terrible. Is—is she——?"

"No, not yet. Mark, is your car outside there? Good! Will you go and bring Parker here? Bring him in a hurry. And—wait a minute— I want a woman. Is there any woman out there, one with sense, I mean?"

"Matildy's in the car. She and I were just goin' for a ride when we heard the news. She'll come, if you want her."

"*Want* her! I never wanted any one more."

"I'll fetch her."

"All right, do. And then go for Parker. If he is out find where he is and go after him there. . . . Oh, yes! and Mark."

"Aye, aye, Eph."

"Some one will have to tell her father. It better be you, I think. Bring Parker first and then go for the Judge. . . . Hold on! Help me carry her into the bedroom."

Carefully and tenderly they lifted Faith Copeland from the sofa and bore her into the little bedroom adjoining the sitting room. There they laid her upon the bed. Bearse hurried out in search of his sister. A minute later Mrs. Hopkins entered. She was pale, but the way in which she set about removing her hat and wrap was a guaranty that the practical coolness and common sense of which Nye was in such sore need had arrived.

"All ready, Doctor," she said.

"I want you to help me," he ordered. "There is water in the pitcher on the commode there. Bring me a towel and a basin." Then, turning to the Gaspard woman, he added, "Keep that door closed. Don't let any one in here except Doctor Parker or Judge Copeland."

It was a half hour later before Doctor Parker reached the Dillingham house. Captain Mark ushered him into the room. Parker was, usually, the embodiment of professional dignity and fussy preciseness. He was not so now. This shocking happening to the daughter of his chief patron, the autocrat of Ostable, had broken his nerve completely. He was an elderly man who made it

a practice to camouflage his sixty-odd years. Now, however, he looked his age—and more.

"Oh, dear!" he quavered. "Oh, dear me! I—I—Where is she?"

Mrs. Hopkins took his hat from his trembling fingers.

"She is in there," she replied, indicating the bedroom. Nye appeared in the doorway of that apartment. He and his fellow physician had not exchanged a word since the former's return to Ostable, but this was no time to remember that fact.

"How—how is she?" faltered Parker.

"She is still unconscious. There may be some concussion, though how serious I can't tell yet. There are bruises, of course, and one ankle is badly sprained. I can find no broken bones. Come in. Mrs. Hopkins, will you and your brother wait here for a while? We may need you. Mrs. Gaspard, you may go now. Thank you very much."

The Portuguese woman nodded contentedly. "I go find Joe—my baby—now," she answered. "That Althy Bemis she loss him long ago, I bet. Goo'-by. You want me more, I come."

Alone with her brother in the sitting room Mrs. Hopkins asked a question.

"Have they sent for Judge Copeland?" she asked.

Captain Mark looked troubled. "The Judge isn't home," he replied. "He went to New York on the Fall River boat last night. They're telegraphin' him at the hotels where he generally stops. My glory! this is awful, isn't it? How is she?"

"You heard what Doctor Eph said. She hasn't come

to yet, poor thing. How did it happen? Have you heard?"

Mark told her. The Gaspard child had darted out into the road directly in the path of the Copeland car. Faith had instantly swung the auto into the fence.

"A spunky thing to do," declared the captain; "but she always was a brave girl. There isn't enough left of the car to make good healthy junk out of. That's the end of the graduatin' present. Dan Copeland didn't figger on anything like this when he indulged her with it, eh?"

Matilda shook her head sadly. "I hope it isn't goin' to be the end of somethin' more precious than the automobile," she said. "He idolizes Faith, the Judge does."

Captain Mark sighed. "Say," he observed, after a moment, "this is about as strange a thing as ever was, isn't it?"

"I don't know. The papers are full every day of accidents pretty near like it."

"I don't mean the accident, exactly. I mean it's happenin' right here in front of this house and—and *him*—" with a motion of the head toward the bedroom—"bein' the one to pick her up and fetch her into this house—*his* house. Whew! . . . What will Daniel say when he finds she's in his hands?"

"He can be thankful."

"Ye—es, he can, but will he? . . . What can I do now to help, Matildy?"

"You can get this gang away from the dinin' room and the windows. Tell 'em to clear out and keep quiet. Tell 'em Doctor Parker says so; that'll have more effect than Doctor Eph's sayin' it. Go along now, but keep within hail. We may need you any time."

The captain started to obey orders. His sister asked one more question.

"Where's that Henry Ward Beecher Payson?" she demanded. "Now that I come to think of it I haven't laid eyes on him since I landed here."

Her brother grunted. "The Lord knows where *he* is," he answered. "'Cordin' to tell he was seen in an automobile—or what was an automobile once—headin' out of town along with Bluey Batchelder. That was about ten o'clock this mornin'."

Matilda sniffed disgust. "You don't say!" she exclaimed. "Those two together, eh? Then 'tisn't the Lord I'd go to to find out where he is. I'd get quicker returns if I asked the Old Harry! Tut, tut, tut! No tellin' when he'll be home again; and to-day of all days! *Why* did Ephraim Nye ever hire that lame duck to work for him?"

Captain Mark's lips curled. "I asked Eph that very thing," he said, "and he told me 'twas because he was a lame duck himself and birds of a feather flocked together. . . . Well, here goes to clear the decks of stragglers. It isn't goin' to be an easy job to shoo some of 'em away. If I was at sea I could use a belayin' pin; here all I can use is talk, and talkin' against Angie Bush and Althy Bemis is like tryin' to wash back Niagara Falls with a hose."

In spite of the captain's efforts all that afternoon and during the dusk of the early evening a crowd, smaller and changing in personnel, hung about the ruins of the Dillingham fence and the Copeland car. Across the road, by the Bemis gate, another group listened to Miss Althea's descriptive lectures on the hows, whys and wherefores

of the accident, watching, meanwhile, the windows of Doctor Nye's sitting room and speculating concerning what was going on within. Occasionally some one of importance, a friend of the Copelands, went to the side door to make inquiries. These callers were invariably waylaid, upon their reappearance, and questioned.

The answers varied little. The visitors had seen Mrs. Hopkins or her brother and had been told that there was nothing to report, nothing new. The two physicians were still working over the injured girl. She had not yet regained consciousness, although it was hoped she might at any time. No bones were broken, but there might be internal injuries. No, Doctor Parker could see no one. As for Doctor Nye, nobody asked to see him.

It was about five o'clock when Parker himself came out, accompanied by Captain Mark Bearse. The doctor was very pale and very nervous. He would say little. When asked if Miss Copeland was out of danger he shook his head. Were her injuries likely to prove fatal? He hoped not—he sincerely hoped not. Had any word been received from the Judge, he asked. None had, so far as they knew. He was going to visit another patient, one seriously ill, in another part of the town, but would return soon. He and the captain rattled away in the latter's car.

At a quarter to six another visitor hastened up the walk to the side door of the Nye residence. Mrs. Hopkins answered his knock.

"Why, Tom!" she exclaimed. "What is it? Your mother—she isn't worse, is she?"

Tom Stone seemed surprised, almost bewildered. "Mother?" he repeated. "Mother? Why, no, she is all

right. Getting on splendidly. . . . What made you think? . . ."

"I don't know. You looked so—so sort of white and—and scared, that I—well, naturally, I——"

He interrupted. "How is she?" he demanded.

"Faith, you mean?"

"Yes; yes, of course. Faith—Miss Copeland, how is she?"

"Why, she is—— Come in a minute, won't you?"

He entered the dining room. At that moment Doctor Nye opened the sitting room door and saw him.

"Why, Tom!" he exclaimed. Then, prompted by the same thought which had caused Mrs. Hopkins to question, he added: "Nothing wrong at home, is there?"

The young man impatiently shook his head. "No," he said. "But—but Faith—Miss Copeland——?"

"She is no worse. She——" The doctor paused, turned his head and listened. Then he hastened back to the other room.

The door of the little bedroom was open and through it he could see the white face upon the pillow. He had been watching it but a moment before and then the eyes were closed. Now they were open and were regarding him. He stooped over the bed.

"Faith," he said.

The eyes looked up into his. There was a puzzled expression in them.

"What—what is it?" asked the girl, faintly. "Why—what——"

"All right, all right," he murmured, soothingly. "You must lie quite still. How do you feel?"

"I—I don't know. I don't seem to—to understand."

"No, of course not. But you must not try to understand yet. Just remember that everything is all right and——"

"But where am I? . . . Am I hurt? . . . Why am I in bed? . . . And—and who are you?"

"I am the doctor."

"The doctor! Am I sick?"

"Just a little, but you are getting better now. You mustn't talk any more. Just——"

"You are not Doctor Parker. . . . Who *are* you?"

There was a new note in her voice, a note of growing alarm. Nye rose.

"Wait a moment," he said gently. "Mrs. Hopkins is here. Mrs. Matilda Hopkins; you know her. She will——"

Again she interrupted. "Why—why—"she faltered. "I know you. You are my uncle—that man—you—— Oh, oh, where am I? Where is my father? . . . No—no, *don't!*"

He had made a move as if to lay his hand upon her forehead, but he did not complete it.

"Hush, hush," he said gently. "I am going to call Mrs. Hopkins. She will tell you everything. And please believe that you are quite safe and that Doctor Parker will be here soon."

"But where is father? Oh—*Tom!*"

Nye turned quickly. Young Stone was standing in the sitting room, a yellow envelope in his hand. He was not looking at the envelope, however, he was looking at Faith Copeland.

"What are you doing in here?" asked Doctor Ephraim sharply.

Tom started, met the doctor's gaze, flushed and extended the envelope.

"It is a telegram from Judge Copeland," he stammered, confusedly. "It reached the office just now and they brought it here. Mrs. Hopkins was in the kitchen, and I knew you would want to see it, so. . . . I'm sorry. I didn't think. I beg your pardon."

He turned toward the door, but Faith Copeland spoke again.

"Oh, Tom," she begged. "Please stay. I—I am afraid."

Stone hesitated. Doctor Nye glanced sharply from one to the other, then turned his attention to the envelope. It was addressed to Doctor Parker, but he tore it open and read the enclosure.

"Faith," he said, "your father is leaving New York on the eleven-thirty train. He will reach Providence at five or a little sooner and he wants the car to meet him there. That will be arranged, of course, and you will see him by seven in the morning, surely. He sends you his love. . . . Tom, will you call Mrs. Hopkins?"

But before Tom could leave the room, Faith spoke again:

"Oh, Tom, please," she pleaded. "I—I am afraid."

Stone paused once more. He was greatly agitated. Nye looked at him and at the wide-eyed, pallid face of his patient.

"He will stay," he said, quietly. "You needn't be afraid—Miss Copeland. I will get Mrs. Hopkins at once and Doctor Parker will be here in a few minutes. Don't talk, and don't ask questions. Remember."

He went out. Matilda was in the kitchen and, after

giving her some hasty directions, he sent her into the sitting room. A moment later Tom came out. He was in what Mrs. Hopkins would have called a "state."

"Doctor," he demanded, "is she—is she going to be all right? Do you—do you think——"

Nye held up a protesting hand. "She is, if she is given a chance," he said, curtly. "She must not be excited, however. Your coming in just then was rather unfortunate."

"I'm awfully sorry. You see I have been over in Denboro and on my way home they told me of—of the accident. I came right down. I'm sorry I went in there. I—I didn't think. The telegram came and——"

"Yes. Well—I didn't know that you and she were such friends."

"Why—why, we used to be. Here—at school, you know; before I went away and—and she did. We knew each other very well—then."

"Um . . . I see. . . . Tom, I want you to do an errand for me, will you?"

"Of course. Anything."

"Your mother is getting on so well now that she doesn't need a nurse. Your father has arranged for Marietta Lamb to do the housework regularly and the nurse from the hospital was to leave your home on Wednesday when her week was up. It will do no harm if she leaves now —to-night. You have a car, haven't you?"

"Yes, the one I have hired for the summer. It is out here. I came in it."

"Good! Then go up to your house, explain to your father and to the nurse that I need her and bring her here at once. Hurry as fast as you can."

"All right, Doctor Eph. . . . You—you think she can't be moved—can't be taken home— Miss Copeland, I mean?"

"Not at present. Probably not for some time. . . . Oh, it is all right, or as nearly right as it can be under the circumstances. Doctor Parker will be in charge of the case and I shall—well, she will not be unnecessarily frightened by any one else. Now go."

When Parker returned two hours later, the nurse from the Wapatomac hospital was already installed. Nye was in the dining room. When Doctor Parker, after a visit to the injured girl, came out again, he found his fellow physician sitting by the table, his pipe in his mouth and a book in his hand. He laid down the volume and motioned to a chair.

"Sit down, Doctor," he said.

Parker accepted the invitation, but with evident reluctance. For some moments he did not speak, but took off his eyeglasses, rubbed them with his handkerchief, put them on again and sat rolling and twisting the handkerchief between his fingers. Several times he opened his lips, but each time closed them without a word. It was Doctor Ephraim who spoke first.

"Well?" he queried. "What do you think?"

Parker looked up and then down again.

"She seems to be getting on better than we—than I could have hoped," he said. "She is asleep now."

"Yes. She regained consciousness about six o'clock and was inclined to be excited and apprehensive. I gave her a quieting dose. Nothing drastic. You saw it on the chart, of course, and no doubt Miss Dana told you.

She is a capable person, the nurse I mean. You know her better than I, probably."

Parker nodded. He stirred uneasily in his chair and fidgeted with the handkerchief.

"This is most unfortunate—most unfortunate," he murmured.

"Yes. But it might have been much more so."

"Of course—of course. You don't apprehend any—any—er—serious outcome, I take it."

"No—unless there should be unexpected developments. Absolute quiet and rest and care, these she must have for some time. You agree with me, don't you?"

"Yes," rather reluctantly. "Yes, I suppose you are right. . . . But——"

"But what?"

"It is very unfortunate—very. You—er—I judge by your bringing the nurse here that you feel that Miss Copeland—er—should not be moved—er—immediately?"

"Moved? You mean taken from this house?"

"Why—why, yes."

"I most decidedly do not. Do you?"

Doctor Parker rolled and unrolled the handkerchief. "Very unfortunate," he said again. "Dear me! Dear me!"

Nye looked at him.

"You have used that word several times," he observed. "Just what do you mean?"

"I mean—why, it is fairly obvious, isn't it? Judge Copeland is a man of—er—strong views and—er—feelings. He—er—well—well——"

Doctor Ephraim interrupted. "You mean that he is likely to object strongly to his daughter's remaining

here—in this house—my house," he said. "That is what you mean, isn't it?"

"Why—why, yes. Naturally, everything considered, he might be expected to—er—dislike the idea. I—well, frankly, I should not consider such a dislike unreasonable."

"Perhaps not. What do you suggest doing?"

"Doing? I—I don't know what you mean?"

"I am putting it as plainly as I can. Do you suggest that she should be taken to her own home at once? Will you assume the responsibility for having her taken there—now?"

"I?" Parker straightened in the chair. "Why should I take that responsibility?" he demanded.

"Because I most emphatically refuse to take it. If she is moved to-night—or to-morrow—yes, or within a fortnight, I shall have nothing whatever to do with it. Plainly, I think it might kill her, and I won't be a party to murder; even though," with a shrug, "it may be more or less universally expected of me."

Doctor Parker threw the handkerchief pettishly upon the table.

"It is *most* unfortunate," he declared.

"I agree with you. It is unfortunate for all of us—particularly for me."

"For you? Really, I must say that your attitude is—is— I don't like it, sir. I do not like it."

"I am not surprised, exactly. But why?"

"Because I don't. Judge Copeland is our leading citizen. . . . Why do you smile?"

"Did I? I beg your pardon. I was thinking of something that I said to—an acquaintance—concerning the

disadvantages of being a leading citizen. But the Judge does occupy that exalted position. Go on."

"He is a highly respected man. A man of honor—and family."

"Yes. And family, of course. Go on."

"His daughter is the pride of his heart. He worships her. He—he is devoted to her. She is injured; she is here—*here* of all places. With—with——"

"With me. But she will be in your charge, not mine. I was obliged to take charge at first, but that was accidental and necessary. If it had not been I should not have done it."

"She will be here for—for some time. He will be obliged to come here to visit her. Here!"

"Unless you take the responsibility of moving her elsewhere."

"Nonsense!" impatiently. "You know she can't be moved."

"Well?"

"Then—then—oh, it is dreadful! It is damnable! Of all places in the world that this should have happened! I declare it seems as if—as if Satan himself was in it."

"Perhaps he is. Do you believe in the devil, Parker? It is out of fashion to believe in him nowadays, but he does help to explain things. And we are told, aren't we, that he, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour?"

Doctor Parker rose from his chair. "I have always understood that he could cite Scripture for his purposes," he declared, tartly. "Well, I must go. I shall be here early in the morning with Judge Copeland. Nye, I—I dislike to ask it, considering what I have just said, but I

must feel that I can rely upon you to an extent. If—if you need me, if any change takes place——"

He hesitated. Doctor Ephraim rose also. "I shall call you if necessary," he said. "I shan't interfere with your case, but as this is my house, I shall be here and ready in an emergency. Between Miss Dana and myself, your patient will be moderately safe, I think. Good night."

Matilda Hopkins and her brother would have remained at the Dillingham house until morning, or indefinitely, if Doctor Nye had deemed their presence helpful in any way. But he would not hear of their doing so. Everything was all right, he said, the nurse was there and he was there. They must go home and go to bed.

Mrs. Hopkins was doubtful. "Who is goin' to get your breakfast, yours and that nurse's?" she wished to know.

"Why, Henry, of course. Henry will be here pretty soon."

Matilda sniffed. Captain Mark snorted.

"He may and he may not," he declared. "And when he does he won't be thinkin' about your breakfast. No, nor carin' much about his own, neither," he added, with conviction. "Matilda and I will go home because you order us to, but we'll be back again to-morrow, and early."

"And I'll bring along somethin' to eat in case it's necessary," vowed Mrs. Hopkins.

During that night Doctor Nye slept but little. He meant to, and he went to bed with that intention, but the human brain cannot be turned off at will like a gas jet, and his continued to work. The astonishing happening which had brought his niece beneath his roof had aroused memories which in turn resurrected others, a

long chain of them, which he had hoped were buried forever. At last, he rose and sought relief from his own thoughts in those of others. Dressing, he came downstairs and sat reading by the dining room table until morning. Miss Dana, the nurse, coming out from the sitting room occasionally, reported that her patient was sleeping fitfully. When she woke she complained of some pain and invariably asked if her father had come. Once the doctor, at the nurse's request, tiptoed in to see her. She was asleep, and the flush upon her cheek seemed to indicate fever. He laid his hand upon her forehead. She woke, saw him, and cried out. He hurried away, feeling guilty. It was a distinctly unpleasant night.

That morning, just before seven o'clock, a big motor car roared down Bayberry Lane and stopped at the place where the Dillingham gate had been. Miss Bemis, awakened by the roar, raised the window shade of her bedroom a discreet inch or two and, peeping beneath, experienced another thrill. From the limousine emerged Judge Daniel Copeland and Doctor Parker and hastened up the walk, the former in the lead. The side door of the Dillingham house opened to receive them.

"My Lordy!" exclaimed Miss Althea, excitedly. "He's come!"

She was upon her knees by the window and in that position she remained for the next hour. To watch and pray is commanded; Miss Althea was not entirely neglectful of these duties, but this morning she was too busy to attend to both.

It was Doctor Ephraim who opened the door for Parker and his companion. Judge Copeland entered first. He was, so it was the town custom to say, a "mighty

young-looking man for his age." Now, however, he looked older, years and years older. Nye, facing him there in the dining room, was almost shocked at the change. For Ephraim Nye to dare to pity Daniel Copeland would, in all orthodox Ostable have been considered an act of impudent and insane sacrilege, but the doctor was close to committing it.

"All right, Judge," he said, quietly. "It's all right. She's getting on well."

"How—how——" faltered Copeland.

"Doing well, I tell you. And she will be better for seeing you. Go in."

Miss Dana opened the door and beckoned. The Judge and Parker entered the sitting room. Before the door closed Nye heard a joyful exclamation of "Father!" and a sobbing cry in answer. He sat down by the table and again took up his book.

Perhaps twenty minutes later he became aware of steps upon the walk outside. They were queerly irregular steps and, to his astonishment, they were accompanied by the sound of music. Some one was singing, or attempting to sing, the cheerful although rather out of date ditty which estimates the distance to a town in Ireland.

"'Itsh long way to Tippera-ree,
Itsh long way to-o go!"

The doctor put down his book and, striding to the door, threw it open. Henry Ward Beecher Payson was balanced on the ancient millstone which formed the threshold. Balanced was the word, but barely that. Mr. Payson swayed and smiled.

"Goo'-by, Pic-hic-dilly,
Farewell——"

"Hello, Doc!" he sang—and said.

Nye shook his head.

"You confounded idiot!" he exclaimed, with fervor.

Henry accepted this estimate of himself with a beaming smile.

"Hello, Doc!" he said again. "I'm back. Been back sooner, only had to go home with—with Bluey. *You* know Bluey. Goo' feller.

"I was seein' Bluey ho—ome—ho—o—me,
I was sheein' Bluey home—
From Aunt Di—i——"

The melody was broken off here. Doctor Ephraim's hand shot forward, seized the lapel of the singer's coat and dragged him bodily across the sill and into the house, a procedure accompanied by much thumping, scrambling and clatter of wooden leg.

"You idiot!" repeated the doctor. "Be still! Shut up! . . . Here," leading Mr. Payson to the kitchen. "Go in there! Sit down in that chair! And don't you move till I tell you to."

Henry sprawled upon the chair, regarded his employer with bland dignity.

"All right, Doc," he agreed serenely. "Jush you say."

Doctor Eph shut the door upon him. He had scarcely done so when the sitting room door opened and Copeland and Parker came out. The latter, closing that door with caution, held up a warning finger.

"She is asleep," he whispered. Nye nodded.

"I have told the Judge," continued Parker, "that in my judgment Miss Copeland must remain here for some time—for the present at least. Naturally, he would prefer her to be—to be——"

"Almost anywhere else. Naturally, as you say. Well, so should I."

Parker was a good deal taken aback; he looked surprised and offended. Judge Copeland stiffened.

"Then we are agreed, as far as that goes," he said, crisply. "However, my daughter's recovery is the only thing to be considered now."

"Exactly." This from Doctor Eph.

"Yes. And so she must stay here, I suppose. I shall, of course, insist upon paying all expenses. For her nurse, of course, for the use of the room, and for the service you rendered her at the time of the accident. For everything."

Nye shook his head. "I am sorry," he said, "but you can't do that, Judge."

"Can't do it. I certainly shall do it."

"Sorry, but you can't. For the nurse—yes; you may pay her. But for the rooms—no."

"Why not?"

"Because they happen to be my rooms and I don't charge for them. I should not rent them to any one else and I shan't to you."

"But—you must. Do you suppose I intend to be under such obligations to you?"

"I'm afraid you can't help yourself. This whole thing is what Doctor Parker called it a while ago, very unfortunate. I don't mean the accident itself. That is, of course, much worse than unfortunate. But that it should

have happened just here is—well, it is almost comic, isn't it? A joke on us both—eh, Judge?"

"A *joke!* Good heavens, do you call it a joke?"

"Why, yes. One of the pleasant little jokes that seem to come my way every once in a while. Something—Fate or whatever it may be—has had a lot of fun at my expense. This is one more merry jest to add to the list, that's all."

"Ephraim Nye——"

"There, there, Dan! What is the use? I won't take a cent from you. If you had called me professionally—admitting such an impossibility to be possible—I shouldn't have gone. Faith was—well, she was thrown in here. She, nor you, nor I, could help ourselves. She is here and, as Parker says, she must stay here for a while. She'll be in his care and I shan't interfere unless something happens while he is away. I should do that, just as any other doctor would, but I won't be paid for it. There are the rooms, use them. And we'll try to make it all as impersonal as we can. . . . No, we won't say any more about it."

Judge Copeland and Doctor Parker looked at each other. Then the latter laid a hand upon the Copeland sleeve.

"Come, Judge," he said. "Doctor Nye, we shall be back in a little while. If—if Miss Dana should need—any assistance while we are gone, I——"

"I shall be here. Well, Judge, what is it?"

Copeland was hesitating. When he spoke it was with difficulty.

"Doctor Nye," he began, and Ephraim noted the fact that it was the first time he had addressed him by his pro-

fessional title; "I—I—you make this so hard for me that —that——"

"Don't try. It is hard for both of us; I realize that. You'll have to admit the joke yourself, when you think it over. Good morning."

"But—yes, Doctor Parker, in a minute— Nye, I realize that I owe you a great deal already. I understand that if you had not been here when my daughter was injured, she—might—God knows what might have happened. I can't think of it. . . . I am told that—I suppose you saved her life. I guess that is what it amounts to. If—if——"

"Never mind, Judge. I did absolutely nothing that any other doctor wouldn't have done. And I didn't know who she was when I brought her into this house. If I had—" he paused, shrugged, and then added, "well, if I had I suppose I should have done the same thing. I couldn't do anything else."

"I suppose—I realize that I ought to be very grateful to you. I ought to thank you. I do."

"No, you don't. That is one thing you can't do. Now go along, before—well, before this conversation becomes too intimate. Good morning."

But the Judge still hesitated.

"Nye," he blurted, after a moment, "you *will* be kind to her, won't you? If it is necessary you will look out——"

"Yes, I told you I would. She will be safe. There is no one here that——"

He was interrupted. The kitchen door opened wide and Henry Ward Beecher Payson swayed and smiled

upon the sill. He held a flat bottle in his hand and with it he beckoned his employer.

"Hey, Doc!" he chirruped, genially. "Jush remembered I had this aboard ship. Some of ole Doc Bluey's 'Lixir of Life. Only lil' left. Have lil' dose with me, Doc? Whash say? Eh?"

Parker and the Judge looked at him. Then at each other. A moment later and they were walking toward the ruins of the gate, disgust and outraged dignity in the rigid lines of their backs. Ephraim Nye stepped to the kitchen door, and once more seized his disreputable employee by the collar. Without a word, he marched him to the foot of the back stairs, up those stairs and into the little chamber over the kitchen. There he pushed him unceremoniously over upon the bed.

"Whash matter, Doc?" inquired Henry, breathlessly.

Doctor Eph slowly shook his head.

"A joke is a joke," he observed, grimly, "but just now you are a laugh too much. You are an anticlimax."

CHAPTER VIII

FOR the remainder of that day the Nye house continued to be the center of interest for North Ostable. It was Monday, and most citizens, male or female, were busy with their own concerns, but nevertheless the majority found time to at least discuss the exciting happenings of the previous twenty-four hours, and some to revisit Bayberry Lane and linger for a few minutes outside the wrecked gate. The crippled and shattered automobile was taken away by Jim Ellis, the garage man from the Center, and a group of boys and girls, on their way home from school at dinner time, watched the transfer and reported to their elders concerning it. Miss Althea Bemis had many callers that morning and afternoon and grew almost hoarse as she described and redescribed the accident, her own part in the events immediately preceding and following it, and what had happened since. The callers returned to their own domiciles to repeat what Althea had said, with embellishments. Mrs. Shubal Bush was one of these repeaters and her husband and Miss Pepper bent eager ears to the tale.

"And," said Angelina, nearing the conclusion of her recital, "here is somethin' she told me that she said she hadn't told to nobody else scarcely. She was up early. Didn't sleep much anyhow, seem's if she didn't, on account of bein' so wrought up and all, and, I guess likely too, because she was afraid she might miss somethin'

if she wasn't on deck to keep lookout. She see Doctor Parker and Judge Copeland come, and then, a little while afterwards—this is the part she ain't told—she heard a noise like somebody singin', singin' right out loud, she says. She looked out of the window and there comes that Henry Payson, zigzaggin' up the road on his wooden leg, and just as tipsy as he could be. 'Twas him singin'!"

"Singin' what?" demanded Aunt Olinda. "What was he singin'?"

"I asked Althy that and she said 'twas a dreadful swearin' kind of song, somethin' about some sort of gang bein' on hand, or somethin'. Said she didn't listen to it only long enough to find out what 'twas; after that she stopped her ears, she says."

Mr. Bush grinned recognition. "*I* know that song," he declared. 'Hail! Hail! the gang's all here!'

To prove his knowledge he sang it. The effort was not received with enthusiasm.

"Humph!" sniffed his wife. "If I knew anything like that I wouldn't make my brags about it. How'd you come to learn it, I want to know?"

"Why—why, I just kind of picked it up, as you might say. It's just a—reg'lar song, that's all."

"Hey?" demanded Aunt Lindy. "What's he sayin'?"

Shubal shouted an explanation. "I said there wan't nothin' new about it. It's just a common song."

"Um—yes. I shouldn't be surprised. Sounded common enough, what I heard of it."

"I didn't mean that kind of common; I meant every day, sort of. Anyhow you wouldn't cal'late a gang that had been drinkin' would tune up the Doxology, 'tain't likely."

"Hey?"

"Oh, thunder mighty! Can't she hear *nothin'?* . . . I say if I was drunk you wouldn't expect I'd sing Old Hundred, would ye?"

"Don't ask *me;* I never see you that way. Better ask Angie."

The conversation, although it became more sprightly, drifted for a time quite away from Mr. Payson's return. It ended by Mr. Bush seizing his hat and announcing that he was going down street where he could have a little mite of peace. At the door he fired a farewell shot.

"Anyhow," he shouted, "that's all bosh about Althy Bemis's not tellin' anybody but you about Henry's comin' back full. All hands I met this forenoon had heard the yarn. Althy couldn't keep a secret no more 'n a fish net could hold water."

"Hey? . . . Hold what?" demanded Miss Pepper.

"Water!" shrieked the exasperated Shubal. "Don't you know what water is?"

"Yes. *I* know first rate. It never larned me any songs like the kind you and that Payson critter sing, neither."

Meanwhile, serenely unconscious that his conduct was adding one more black mark to the already sufficiently blackened reputation of the household of Ephraim Nye, M.D., the object of this family chat slumbered in his bedroom over the kitchen and continued to slumber until late that afternoon. Mrs. Hopkins, true to her promise, came early and insisted on preparing the doctor's breakfast. Captain Mark came, to, as he said, "stand watch" while his friend went on his round of few and scattered professional visits. Mrs. Gaspard dropped in to inquire

concerning the victim of the accident. "The Doc he smart man," she informed Bearse. "If he didn't be smart and help quick she die," with a jerk of her head in the direction of the sitting room. "Maybe she go to die anyhow, eh? No? Then that Frankie-George just tell more big lies. Good! I'm glad. She nice smart girl. Well, goo'-by. I come again pretty quick, maybe."

Doctor Parker and Judge Copeland returned at ten o'clock and the latter remained by his daughter's bedside the greater part of the day. It was half past five, Copeland had just gone and Nye was alone in the dining room, when he heard a hesitating step behind him and, turning, saw his disreputable man-of-all-work standing in the doorway of the kitchen. The doctor looked at Henry and Henry looked at him. The former's look was steady and uncompromising; Mr. Payson's was somewhat uncertain.

Neither spoke for a moment, then the prodigal cleared his throat, smiled, blinked several times, and observed, "Good mornin', Doctor Eph. It's a nice mornin', ain't it?"

The doctor remained silent. Henry tried again. "I say it's a nice mornin'," he repeated. "One of them kind of mornin's you don't often see at this time—at this time —er—er——"

He seemed to be groping for an end to the sentence, so his employer supplied it.

"At this time in the evening," he suggested, gravely. "You are quite right, Henry."

Mr. Payson blinked again. "What time *is* it, Doc?" he inquired, confidentially.

"About twenty minutes to six."

"Six? Six? Mornin' or night?"

"Night."

Henry thought it over. He groped for his forehead, located it and rubbed it, thoughtfully.

"Sho!" he exclaimed. "Six at night, eh? . . . What day is it, Doc?"

"Monday."

"Humph! . . . Well, that's a little better, anyhow. Last time 'twas Tuesday. Yes sir, that's some improvement."

He seemed to find comfort in the thought. Doctor Nye's lip curled.

"You had better go back to bed again," he said. "And undress this time."

"Me? To bed? No sir-ee! I'm up—up for good. Say, Doctor Eph," triumphantly, "I done what you told me to. I took care of my leg. My leg's all right. See?"

"I see. How about your head?"

"My head?" Henry grinned, sheepishly. "Well, my head ain't so real good, I guess likely. But it will be pretty soon. Say, Doctor Eph, when did I get home?"

"A little after daylight."

"You don't say! Well, that wan't so bad, after all. Was I—was I kind of—er—what you might call shipwrecked?"

"Yes."

"I shouldn't be surprised. . . . But I wan't a total wreck, Doctor. No sir-ee, *I* wan't!" With a reminiscent chuckle, he added: "You ought to seen Bluey."

"Thanks. I'm satisfied as it is. Now you go back to bed and stay there till morning."

"Now—now, Doctor Eph, don't be foolish. You ain't mad, are you?"

"Go to bed."

"Wait a minute. Bluey cal'lated you'd be mad, but I said no. 'The average run of folks might be put out,' I says, 'but not Doctor Eph Nye; no sir! He's all right, he understands. A feller that's been through what he has,' I says, 'ain't goin' to make a fuss about little things. He's broad-minded. He don't set around and preach morals and all that. All hands knows it. They'll tell you so. Why, he ain't got no *use* for morals. He—' *All* right, Doctor. I'll go; you needn't pilot me. And to-morrow mornin' I'll be fit's a fiddle. Yes, I will—honest."

There might have been some questions as to the complete fitness, but there certainly could have been none concerning his change of appearance and mental attitude. It was a humble and repentant Henry that Nye found at work in the kitchen at breakfast time. The doctor did not refer to the Payson fall from grace, but the fallen one himself mentioned it almost immediately. He busied himself over the stove for a moment and then crossed to the dining room door and closed it.

"Doctor Eph," he said, without looking at his employer, "would you mind settin' down in that chair for a jiffy? I just want to talk to you. 'Twon't take long."

Nye shook his head. "I'll stand, Henry," he replied. "Go ahead, but make it short."

"I cal'late to. . . . I've been thinkin' it over, Doctor, and there don't seem to be a very big choice of folks that would come here to work; not the right kind there ain't. Hired help is pretty scurce in Ostable anyhow; the sum-

mer folks mostly has to fetch theirs down from Boston. Then there's the—er—prejudice in town—all darn foolishness, but two-thirds of 'most any town are darn fools, anyhow. I tell you, Doctor, if you don't mind one of them Roses, there's that Gaspard woman. I shouldn't wonder if you could hire her if you wanted to. Her talk's kind of pigeon-toed, but she's pretty capable, I guess, and——"

He was hurrying through this long rigmarole, not looking at Nye, but pretending to play with the frying pan and a jar of bacon. The doctor spoke.

"Here, here, Henry!" he broke in. "Stop a second. What are you talking about?"

"Eh? . . . Why, I'm talkin' about that Eva Gaspard. She's a pretty smart Portygee. She was here a half hour or so ago, askin' about Faith Copeland. Course I didn't say nothin' about her comin' to cook for you, but——"

"Wait. Why should she come? I don't want any more cooks."

"No more; no. But you've got to have one, ain't you? I'll be gettin' through—well, at the end of the week, or sooner if you say so. Then you'll have to have somebody. . . . She might not be so bad. Don't believe she'd p'ison you."

He broke an egg into the frying pan.

"Guess you'd better hire her, hadn't you, Doctor Eph?" he said.

Nye did not answer. Henry broke another egg beside the first. He glanced over his shoulder at his employer, caught the latter's eye, turned quickly back again and deposited several strips of bacon in the neighborhood of the eggs. He stirred these nervously with a fork. Still

the doctor remained silent. Henry's nervousness increased.

"Well?" he queried, after another interval. "What do you say, Doctor Eph?"

Nye turned toward the door. "I haven't said anything yet, have I?" he asked.

"Eh? . . . Why no; don't know's you have."

"Then why worry?"

"Eh?" Henry turned completely around this time. "Worry!" he repeated. "I ain't worried about myself—not much. I'll scratch along somehow, same as I done afore you come back here to live. But I am kind of worried about you. You've got to have somebody to cook and wash dishes. There ain't so many that would be willin' to work for you. . . . I mean that would be—I mean—that is, I didn't mean——"

He was much flustered. Doctor Nye's smile broadened.

"There, there!" he interrupted. "It's all right, Henry. Let it go at that. You couldn't improve on it."

"I could, too. Course I could. I never meant to say no such thing as that. My talk got snarled up. I just——"

"Sshh! sshh! It is the truth, don't spoil it. Why paint the lily?"

"Paint? What paint? I ain't paintin' nothin'! I'm fryin' eggs!"

"Keep on frying them. And keep on working here—unless you want to go somewhere else."

"What! . . . Here, hold on, Doctor! You mean that!"

"Yes, I am satisfied, if you are."

The sizzling bacon and eggs forgotten, Mr. Payson regarded him.

"Then you're easy satisfied, that's all I can say," he vowed. "Look here, Doctor Eph, let's be common sense about this. Course it's fine of you to offer to keep me on and forgive me and all that. To tell you the truth I more'n half suspicioned you would, if I'd let you. You're the forgivin' kind."

Doctor Nye's smile faded. Slowly he shook his head.

"I am, am I?" he said. "You—well, Henry, you are a wonderful reader of character."

Payson nodded. "I ought to be," he observed, complacently. "Had consider'ble experience in my day and time. But here's a case where forgivin' is just foolish, that's all. Course I could swear right up and down I'd never touch another drop long's I live. Way I feel now I never want to see rum, let alone taste it. Especially," with a shudder, "the kind Bluey Batchelder fetches around. You have to swaller that fast so as *not* to taste it. B-r-r-r! Of all the. . . . But never mind that. I could swear blue now, but in a month or so I'm liable to go on another time. Just as liable as not—yes, and liabler. You can't keep on firin' me and hirin' me over again."

"I haven't fired you yet. And I'm not going to."

"But, Doctor Eph, talk sense. I go off and get drunk and leave you, and while I'm gone all this happens. I can't tell you how I felt when that Eva Gaspard told me about Faith Copeland. You all alone here, and havin' to depend on her for help. Just when you needed me most, too. I ought to be put in jail. That's where folks like me belong!"

Nye, at the door, his hands in his pockets, spoke over his shoulder.

"Stay here with me instead," he suggested. "It might do, I should think, as a substitute."

"Hey? . . . Good Lord, Doc! Don't take it that way. I didn't mean——"

"Look out! Those eggs are burning."

So Henry Ward Beecher Payson remained as cook and bottle washer at the old Dillingham house and it was he who opened the door for Judge Copeland when the latter came to visit his daughter. To his polite "Good mornin', Judge," the great man returned no answer save a disapproving grunt. Doctor Parker, the echo of his patron, ignored him except when absolutely necessary. Miss Dana, the nurse, in whose ears tales of the Payson character—or lack of it—had been repeated by the eloquent tongues of Miss Bemis and other neighbors, was careful to have as little to do with him as possible. Henry was shunned, snubbed and in every way made to realize his pariahdom. Even Captain Mark Bearse, although he was as always a loyal defender of his friend's idiosyncrasies, was impelled to remonstrate in private against what he considered an unnecessary defiance of public opinion.

"What *do* you keep that Henry Payson around here for?" he demanded. "He's no good and never was. The way you hauled Faith out of that wrecked auto and took care of her and—yes, saved her life, as you might say, all that was makin' you more popular, and— What are you grinnin' at?"

"At your choice of words, Mark," replied Nye. "Popular, I think you said."

Captain Mark, himself, was obliged to grin. "Well, maybe 'popular' was a little mite too strong," he admitted. "But all that did help, just the same. And then, to heave the whole craft down again, here comes this Payson home tight as a new rubber boot, right in the face and eyes of Dan Copeland and Althy Bemis and everybody else. And you don't do nor say anything, but let him stay aboard here as if nothin' had happened. It's like paintin' 'Go to blazes' on the front fence. Do you *want* to keep the mud puddle stirred up? I declare if it don't seem as if you enjoyed seein' it rile."

Doctor Eph pulled at his pipe.

"Your choice of similes is as bad as your choice of words, Mark," he observed. "Rubber boots and puddles suggest water, and water has so little in common with our Henry Ward Beecher friend."

"Humph! *You* hadn't ought to have anything in common with him."

"Doubtless—but, you see, I have."

CHAPTER IX

ALL that week Faith Copeland remained in bed in the little room adjoining the sitting room. Doctor Parker came twice a day; her father, neglecting his professional duties at the courthouse, spent the most of his afternoons and evenings at her bedside; the nurse was on duty at night Nye carefully kept away. The few—the very few patients who came to consult him he received in the dining room. Copeland and he seldom met and, when they did, merely exchanged nods. Parker was quite as formal and was given no encouragement to be anything else. It was a peculiar situation.

Captain Mark came almost every other evening for his checker game and Tom Stone occasionally dropped in. In fact the young man's calls were becoming more than occasional, they were almost regular. He was always welcome. Doctor Eph, having performed what he considered his duty by warning Tom that he should not risk his reputation by visiting the fold of Ostable's black sheep, and finding no attention whatever paid to the warning, philosophically accepted the inevitable. He found some enjoyment in the experience. It was pleasant, and distracting, to be again in touch with youth and hope and youth's plans for the future.

Tom, of course, always inquired concerning Miss Copeland's condition. Nye, his own information obtained from the nurse, reported progress. Faith was getting on toward recovery, but the nerve shock had been severe and

it would be some time before she was strong enough to be taken home.

"Just—er—remember me to her, will you, Doctor Nye," suggested Stone. The doctor replied that he would transmit the remembrance, per Miss Dana.

The sitting room and bedroom were fragrant with flowers. They came by express and parcel post or were handed in at the door. Judge Copeland brought daily bouquets from his own greenhouse. Whiffs of their perfume drifted out to sweeten the air of the dining room.

On Sunday, a week after her accident, Faith was reported as sitting up for the first time. That evening Miss Dana, her patient asleep, passed by the dining room table, beside which Doctor Eph was sitting, a volume of Thackeray in his hand. The nurse seemed to have something on her mind.

"Doctor Nye," she said. "I want to speak with you a moment. May I?"

Nye put down the book. "Of course," he said.

She hesitated. "I—I want to ask if you think—— Well, something happened this afternoon that—that I am not sure should have happened. And, in a way, I suppose I am responsible. I want to know if you think I did wrong."

The doctor looked at her. "Something in connection with Miss Copeland, was it?" he inquired.

"Why—why, yes it was."

"Then you should ask Doctor Parker, I should say."

"Yes—yes, I know. But I had rather not ask him, or even tell him unless it is necessary. He is such a—such a fuss. I never worked for such a—— There! I mustn't say that."

"What was it you wanted to ask?"

"Well—I shouldn't ask you, you know, but we—but I was with you on Mrs. Stone's case and—and you are so different. . . . Please don't look at me like that. I know I shouldn't say it; but you are, just the same. . . . This is what I wanted to ask: do you think I did wrong in letting Miss Copeland see a—a friend for a very little while? She is *so* much better and she called to him to come in, and he came before I could stop him."

"Who was the friend?"

"I was going to tell you. She was in the big chair in the sitting room. Her father had gone and Doctor Parker had gone and I had gone up to my own room for just a minute. You were out, too. When I came down I found Mr. Stone—young Mr. Stone, you know—in the sitting room there with her. He had come to this door here and Henry had let him in. She—Miss Faith, I mean—had heard his voice, and recognized it, apparently, and called to him to come in there. And there he was. They were talking together. They are old friends, it seems. I was going to tell him he must go, but she begged him to stay, and—and asked me to let him stay, and—and so I did. But only for a *very* little while. And, truly, Doctor Nye, I don't think it did her a bit of harm. In fact, she was in better spirits than I have ever seen her. But it has troubled me ever since. Do you think I did wrong?"

The doctor shook his head. "You shouldn't ask me," he said. "She is in Doctor Parker's care."

"Yes, I know. But—but—do you think I ought to tell him about it?"

"Yes."

"Oh, dear! I don't want to. I don't like him. And I *know* that seeing some one beside him and her father was good for her. I know it was."

"Nevertheless you should tell the doctor."

"Well, I suppose I must. But Mr. Stone was so—so cheerful and considerate; and—and he's such a *nice* boy."

"You can tell Doctor Parker that."

She sniffed. "There are some people you can't tell anything," she declared. "They know it all already. And my saying *that* is most unprofessional, too."

The next day one of the Gonzales twins—first set—came down with the measles. The other followed suit. The Dagona grandchildren next door entered in competition. Ephraim Nye, M.D., was in demand, and for the first time since his return was extremely busy with a real, if not lucrative, practice. The dining room of the Dillingham house saw little of him except at meal times and then not for long. Parker was busy also for the measles microbe—plainly a democratic germ—had visited the homes of several of Ostable's best families.

The following Sunday, late in the afternoon, Doctor Ephraim returned from a prolonged session at the "Portygee nest" to find a note bearing his name upon the dining room table. It was from his eminently respectable colleague and was surprising in import as well as characteristic in style.

Doctor Ephraim Nye.

Sir:

I am confined to my room with a slight touch of the influenza. Doctor Hayes, of Denboro, has kindly consented to look after my practice in the main, but, at Judge Copeland's request, I am constrained to ask you to keep

a general eye upon Miss Copeland's condition for the next few days. She is gaining steadily and will, I believe, soon be sufficiently recovered to permit her removal to her own house. I, naturally, recommended Doctor Hayes to the Judge, but, for some reason, which I confess I do not understand, he seems reluctant to accept him as my temporary substitute. In fact it was he who suggested your looking after her. You will continue, of course, with the treatment I have been using. The nurse will instruct you concerning it. I expect to be able to relieve you by Tuesday at the latest. Deeply regretting the unfortunate necessity of troubling you, I am

Yours truly,

CALVIN G. PARKER.

P. S.—I have asked Miss Dana to report to me daily as I wish to exercise general supervision of the case.

Nye's first action after reading this business-like epistle was an unusual one for him; he laughed aloud. Then he stepped to the door of the kitchen and, opening it, found Mr. Payson dozing in a chair by the rear window.

"When did this come?" he asked, holding up the Parker note.

Henry blinked, stretched, and came to life.

"About half an hour ago," he said. "Burgess Pepper's boy—him that drives auto for Doctor Parker—fetched it down. Come in the car, he did. He says his boss is kind of knocked out with a cold. I says to him, says I, 'What business has he got to be sick?' I says. He's a healthy doctor, ain't he, Doctor Eph?"

"Unhealthy, I should say, Henry. Miss Dana is in the sitting room, I suppose."

"No—no, she's out for a little walk. She said what

she needed was fresh air and I told her that all outdoors was full of it. She'll be back pretty soon. Don't hardly never stay out long, she don't."

"Humph! . . . Is Faith—is Miss Copeland all alone, then?"

"No. No, no, Doctor, she ain't alone. Course not."

"Oh, I see. Her father is with her."

"No, the Judge was here up to three o'clock. Then he had to go home. Some sort of business letters he had to write, so the nurse said. He'll run in this evenin', same as he generally does, I presume likely."

"Well, who is with her now?"

"Oh, Tom. He and she are good company. They get along fust-rate together."

"Tom? . . . Tom Stone, do you mean?"

"Sartin."

"Humph! . . . Humph! . . . Was he here when the Judge left?"

"Him? I guess *not!* Dan Copeland ain't so friendly with none of Cyrenus's folks as all that comes to. But that don't make no difference. What he don't know won't hurt him any. And Tom and Faith ain't prejudiced like the old folks. Why, he comes to see her pretty nigh every day, or evenin', for a little spell. They're good chums, them two."

Nye twisted the letter in his fingers. "Humph!" he said again. "Does Doctor Parker know that?"

"About Tom's callin'? *I* don't know. Presume likely he does. That Dana girl, she knows. She told me not to say nothin' about it outside the house 'cause a lot more folks would want to come and 'twouldn't do for Faith to be entertainin' all hands and the cook. . . . Say, Doc-

tor Eph, that letter's from old Parker, ain't it? What's ailin' him, more'n his cold, I mean?"

Nye did not answer. Still thoughtfully twisting and untwisting the Parker letter, he walked slowly toward the sitting room. The door was closed. He rapped upon it and entered. Miss Copeland, looking remarkably attractive in spite of her pallor, was in the big chair by the window, her injured ankle upon a stool. Tom Stone was seated in the rocker by the table.

Both looked up when he came in and both were plainly surprised and startled. Tom voiced the surprise.

"Why, Doctor Nye!" he exclaimed. "It's you, isn't it? . . . We—I thought it was Miss Dana coming back."

Faith said nothing. Nye briefly explained his reasons for entering his own sitting room for the first time in almost a fortnight.

"I am only a temporary nuisance," he added. "Doctor Parker expects to be in charge again by Tuesday. I shall trouble you as little as possible, Miss Copeland."

Faith opened her lips to reply, then, apparently changing her mind, closed them again and merely nodded. She was regarding her uncle with an odd expression, a troubled, perplexed expression it seemed. Stone rose.

"I—I think I must be going," he explained. "I was acting as a sort of—well, guard, you know—while Miss Dana took her walk. Good night, Doctor. Good night, Faith."

"Wait a minute," said the doctor. "It may be that you had better stay until the nurse comes. This young lady should not be left alone."

"But she won't be. You are with her."

"Ye-es, but she may have some preferences—even prejudices, perhaps. As you are here, Tom," there was the slightest emphasis on the "are," "don't you think you had better stay a little longer?"

Tom hesitated. It was Faith who answered. "You had better go, I think," she said. "I shall be all right. I don't mind, really."

So he went. Nye, stepping to the door, detained him momentarily. "When you have time, Tom," he said. "I should like to talk with you. . . . Oh, not now. To-morrow will do."

He came back to the invalid and, sitting down in a chair beside her, asked her a few professional questions. She answered them briefly and simply.

"Of course," he explained. "I realize that this is unpleasant for you. It is somewhat unpleasant for me. Doctor Parker and your father asked me to take charge, that is all. I shall trouble you just as little as possible."

She had been regarding him with that same perplexed, doubtful expression. When she first regained consciousness after the accident and found him beside her, she had been afraid, had said so. Whatever her feelings now might be fear had no part in them.

"I don't mind," she said, slowly. "I—I realize that I should be grateful to you. Tom—Mr. Stone—says that you saved my life. I should have died, shouldn't I, if you hadn't acted so promptly?"

"Why—no, I would hardly say that."

"I suppose it is true. I asked father and he doesn't deny it. It seems strange. I don't feel in the least as if I had been so near death."

"You are a long way from it now."

"I'm glad. I don't want to die. And I am very much obliged to you. That seems a ridiculously inadequate way of putting it. . . . It is rather hard for me to —to talk—to——"

"To me. Naturally. So you mustn't do it."

"Tom says you—he says you are——"

"Never mind. You must rest now."

"But. . . . I can't understand. . . ."

"Don't try. Most things are not worth understanding. . . . Ah, here's the nurse. She will look out for you now. Good night."

Miss Dana was surprised to see him there, surprised and somewhat disturbed, he thought. He gave her directions concerning the care of the patient and went out to his supper in the kitchen. The situation troubled him. He meant to have a full and frank understanding with the nurse and with young Stone. If Daniel Copeland knew that the latter was seeing and talking with his daughter then things were all right. If he did not know it—and considering the enmity between the Judge and Cyrenus it seemed unthinkable that he did—then things were most decidedly wrong and likely to be more so. He, Ephraim Nye, did not intend to be responsible for their continuance. He would talk with Miss Dana first and with Tom afterwards.

But his supper was not finished when a messenger from one of the measles-infected household came to tell him of another case in the family and beg him to come at once. He did not return home until almost midnight and the next morning after a hurried interview with Faith, was obliged to go out again. He and the nurse did not have that talk and when he came home at three

o'clock that afternoon it was too late. The bomb had exploded.

Henry Ward Beecher Payson's ears were still ringing with the shock of the explosion and his vocal organs were quivering with excitement.

"My thunder, Doctor Eph!" he exclaimed, as his employer entered the house. "If I ain't glad to see you there ain't many that be."

Nye removed his hat and put his medicine case upon the table.

"Not so very many, Henry, that's a fact," he observed. "But I'm glad if you are. What's up?"

"What's up? The old Harry himself is up. That's who's up."

"Well, he is usually fairly well elevated in this world—and well down in a section of the next, so they say. Where is he up this time?"

"Hey? Right here, by mighty! Right here in this house. In that settin' room."

"What? What's that? Is Faith——"

He was on the way to the sitting room door, but Henry seized his arm.

"Don't go in there, Doctor," he begged. "Not yet. He's there."

"He? Who? The devil?"

"The devil? What you talkin' about?"

"He is the only 'he' you have named so far. Hurry up! Who is in there?"

"The Judge. Dan Copeland. Oh, there's been the very dickens to pay! That Dana girl she's gone and——"

"Gone! Gone where?"

"*I* don't know. Gone, that's all I can tell you. Gone

for good. Fired. And they've sent for a new nurse from the hospital. She——"

His employer broke in here. He laid a hand upon the Payson shoulder and pushed him into the kitchen.

"Now tell me the whole of it, and be quick," he ordered.

So Henry spun his yarn. It had happened about noon. Judge Copeland had come in a great hurry.

"I let him in," spluttered Henry, "and I see right off there was somethin' the matter. He's always sort of red in the face, the Judge is, but now he was all lit up inside like a—like a punkin lantern, as you might say. Wouldn't even say a word. Just marched by me and into that settin' room. In about a minute more out he come again and that Dana girl with him. She was all of a shake and scart about to death. I was kind of curious, you understand, and was sort of hangin' around, makin' believe dust or somethin'. 'You get out of here,' says he to me. If I'd been a—a dog he couldn't have talked more short. If I'd had a chance to think I'd have told him to go to blazes. No man can talk to me that way; by thunder! No sir, they can't! But he kind of got me by surprise, and——"

Commanded to hurry up, Henry suppressed his own feelings and went on with his story. He had gone to the kitchen and Judge Copeland had closed the door after him. He, therefore, was unable to hear what was said in the dining room, but there had been "a whale of a row." Miss Dana had gone to her room in tears and, shortly after, had left the house, "bag and baggage." A new nurse had been sent for; he knew that because he heard Judge Copeland tell his chauffeur to go to the

Wapatomac hospital at once and bring the woman back with him. The Judge, so he gathered, had telephoned the hospital already. Yes, he was in the sitting room now. And——

The doctor waited to hear no more. He left his man-of-all-work still spluttering and expostulating and reëntered the dining room. As he did so Judge Copeland came in from the sitting room.

"Good afternoon, Judge," said Nye, quietly.

Copeland pointed an agitated finger.

"You're here at last, are you?" he cried. "I've been waiting. I want to talk to you."

CHAPTER X

NYE, for the matter of that, had been wanting to talk to the Judge. He was quite determined to do so. But his brother-in-law's tone and manner, as he stood there brandishing his forefinger, had a characteristic effect upon his own.

"Indeed?" he queried, with every appearance of polite surprise. "To me? And you *want* to do it? Judge, I am flattered."

Copeland ignored the implied compliment. He waved an impatient hand.

"I want to talk to you," he reiterated. "I want to know—— Look here, did you know this was going on?"

"What?"

"*What!* You know what I mean, or I think you do. Did you. . . . Here, shut that door. I don't care to be heard by outsiders."

He pointed to the door of the kitchen. Mr. Payson was visible in the latter apartment; he had been standing still, now he became exceedingly busy.

Doctor Ephraim glanced over his shoulder.

"Oh, Henry isn't an outsider," he observed, cheerfully. "Henry is a part of the *ménage*—or the menagerie. You prefer 'menagerie', Daniel, I'm sure."

"Shut that door, will you!"

"Judge, if you really don't care to be heard by outsiders I should suggest your using a lower tone."

Copeland, taken aback, choked, hesitated, and blurted

a somewhat ungracious explanation—it could scarcely be called an apology.

"Eh? . . . Oh, I see," he grumbled. "I—well, the fact is, I am so—I didn't realize——"

"I know you didn't. . . . Henry, shut that kitchen door."

Payson obeyed orders and with emphasis. Nye turned to his visitor.

"Now, Judge," he said, "what is it you want to know?"

"I want to know who is responsible for the underhand business that has been going on here? Did you know that that boy of Cyrenus Stone's has been coming to this house to see Faith? Did you know that?"

Nye stroked his chin. "No-o, not until very recently," he replied.

"Recently! How recently?"

"Well, last night was the first time I got a hint of it. When did you find it out? And how?"

"Never mind, that doesn't matter. I ask you——"

"But I asked you first. How did you find it out?"

"Well, I—I don't see that that makes any difference. . . . I was told."

"By ——?"

"By some one who has seen him come here. Yes, and not only once, but over and over again. Why——"

"Just a minute, Judge. Seen him over and over again, eh? That sounds like Althea Bemis."

"I did not say so."

"You didn't need to. It couldn't have been any one else.

'And watching with eternal lids apart,
Like nature's patient, sleepless Eremite.'

That's Althea; I'm afraid we *have* kept her awake lately. It was Althea, wasn't it, Judge?"

"Well . . . if it was I am very much obliged to her. And I want you to answer my question. Are you responsible for any part of this?"

"Of Tom's coming here to see your daughter? No. Miss Dana could have told you that, I should think. By the way, you have gotten rid of Miss Dana, I understand."

"You bet I have! And it didn't take me long, either. The sneaking little——"

"There, there! Have you gotten rid of me, too?"

Copeland stared. "Of you?" he repeated. "What do you mean?"

"Why, I am—or I supposed I was—the doctor in charge here. Parker wrote me asking me to take charge until he was well again. He wrote that you, yourself, wished me to do so. Was that true?"

"Well—yes. I haven't any confidence in that Denboro doctor."

"And you had more in me? Is that it?"

"Why—er—I suppose so. Professionally, yes."

"Then what do you mean by discharging a nurse and hiring another without consulting me? What do you mean by interfering with my patient?"

The Judge's mouth opened. "What!" he gasped. "Why—why, it is my daughter that—that——"

"Who is my patient, in my care. You and Parker put her there. You had no right whatever to interfere with Miss Dana, to say nothing of discharging her. For the matter of that she had no right to accept a discharge from you, or any one but me."

"Do you mean to tell me that I can't say who shall take care of my own daughter?"

"You could have said it to me and then, if I agreed with you, I should have said it to her. As it is, you have— But there! you did it. And I give up the case."

He and his brother-in-law had been standing during this interview. Now he swung about, pulled forward a chair and, sitting down, turned his back upon the enraged Judge. The latter gazed at that back in incredulous amazement.

"You—you give up the *case!*" he exclaimed. "You—you mean you—you won't——"

"I mean that you may call Hayes or any one else you please. You may do exactly *as* you please, with the complete understanding that I have no part or responsibility in your daughter's professional care or treatment hereafter. That's all."

For a full minute the only sounds in the room were Copeland's heavy breathing and the slight rustle occasioned by the doctor's taking his pipe from his pocket and reaching to the stand by the window for his tobacco tin. Then the Judge spoke again in an entirely different tone.

"But—but you—you *must,*" he expostulated. "Hayes is useless; he is only a young fellow just out of college. He has had no experience. And Parker is a sick man. Good Lord, Nye, you can't do this thing! Faith can't be left without any one. I—I—why, it was she that insisted upon having you. She said she would feel safer with you than with any one else. When I told her of Parker's illness she said that."

Nye did not answer. Copeland tried again.

"You *can't* do this thing," he cried, his emotion increasing. "I am—I have been almost crazy; you know it. Man, haven't you *any* feelings? Think of me! She—she is all I have in this world."

Nye waved a hand. "Hush!" he ordered.

"But——"

"Hush! You say that she asked for me?"

"Yes, she did. I don't know why. I suppose—well, she seems to have confidence in you. At the time of the accident——"

"Hush! Be still."

"If you want more money. If it is a question of pay—Good Lord! Are you *laughing*?"

Doctor Eph had risen and turned. It was the expression upon his face which had caused his brother-in-law's horrified expostulation. A little of that expression remained as he answered.

"Not exactly laughing, Judge," he said. "Wondering a little, that's all. Your exquisite tact was always a wonder to me."

"I suppose that's more of your damned sarcasm. With my girl in there—hurt—sick—dying, for what I know—you can stand there and— But I might have expected it. My sister——"

"Sshh!" sharply. "That's enough. Faith isn't dying; she isn't even very sick—unless you have made her so in the last few minutes. Tell me, have you been talking to her about Tom Stone?"

"Eh? . . . Yes, certainly I have."

"In this same considerate, tactful manner? I imagine you have. In that case she may be sick, after all."

He walked toward the door of the sitting room. The Judge caught his arm.

"Where are you going?" he demanded.

"I'm going in there to see what damage you've done. And, listen; don't you dare interfere again. Don't you even speak to her again until I tell you you may."

"Then—then you will stand by her? You will look out for her?"

"I'll stand by, as you call it, until Parker comes back, provided you behave yourself."

He went into the sitting room, closing the door behind him. Faith was sitting in her chair by the window. He was prepared to find her in almost any condition, fainting, tearful, hysterical—fevered doubtless. She had recovered remarkably from the shock of the accident, but goodness only knew what collapse her father's brainstorm might have brought about. The Judge had, probably, roared into the sick room like a locomotive into a roundhouse, puffing hot steam and cinders. The scene with the nurse had no doubt been as peaceful as an Irish election. Doctor Nye was apprehensive.

But, judging by appearances, he need not have been. Faith was not hysterical, nor in a state of collapse. Her eyes were a trifle reddened and her color was high. In fact, her external symptoms were only those of an attractive, and, it might be, somewhat spoiled young woman whose temper was decidedly ruffled. Judge Copeland was accustomed to having his own way, but, up to now, that way had been his daughter's.

"Oh," she exclaimed, as the doctor approached her chair, "it is you, Doctor Nye, isn't it? I'm glad. I was afraid—I thought it was dad."

Doctor Ephraim laid a hand upon her forehead. She did not object now, as she had when recovering consciousness after the accident. Her face was flushed and her pulse was rapid, but the clinical thermometer revealed little or no advance in temperature. She wanted to talk, that was evident.

"Where is father?" she demanded, as soon as the thermometer was removed.

"He was in the other room. He has probably gone by now. He will be back pretty soon, I am sure."

"I don't know that I want to see him. He has been perfectly outrageous. I suppose you knew he discharged Miss Dana."

"Yes, he told me."

"Did you ever hear anything so wicked? Poor thing! And he wouldn't let me say a word. You would think he was some sort of—of emperor or something. And all because she allowed Tom Stone to come here to talk with me occasionally. A boy I have known all my life—almost. It is the most foolish—why, I never was so humiliated! I am not a child."

"Yes, yes, of course; I know. But the Judge didn't stop to think of that, I suppose. And he doesn't like the Stones. . . . Now you mustn't talk. I want you to rest."

"Of course I shall talk. I only wish dad were here so I could talk to him. Does he suppose because he and old Mr. Stone have been squabbling ever since I can remember that Tom and I are going to do the same thing? We are not so silly. It is absurd. And what possible *harm* was there in it? It was such a—such a comfort to see some one who was young—and alive."

"Yes, yes, I know. I understand. Probably your father will understand, too, when he thinks it over."

"I don't believe it. He is so prejudiced against Tom's family. Wasn't that a car? Who is coming? Is it Tom? If it is I shall see him. I shall."

"No, you mustn't see any one now. You are excited and I want you to rest. I imagine that is the new nurse."

"I don't want to see her. I know I shall hate her. Poor Miss Dana! She was *so* nice! And not the least *bit* fussy."

Doctor Ephraim was thinking how much trouble might have been averted if the Dana girl had been more "fussy." He blamed himself for bringing her there. Yet she had been particular enough during the typhoid siege at the Stone house. Youth and the kindred sympathy of youth were to blame here, of course. He was relieved, when the new nurse appeared, to find her middle-aged and, apparently, not in the least likely to lean toward romance or sentiment.

Faith, by this time in a state of tears and nervous exhaustion, was put to bed. The new nurse—her name was Rebecca Ginn, no romance about that—took businesslike charge. The doctor prescribed complete rest, leaving a harmless sleeping powder to be administered if necessary. Before he left the room Faith called him to her bedside.

"You are going to be here now, aren't you?" she asked. "Father said you were, while Doctor Parker is sick."

"Yes."

"I am glad. Tom thinks you are a wonderful doctor."

"He may be prejudiced. I taught him a little football years ago and he hasn't forgotten it."

"He told me so. I don't remember much about that.

Tom is older than I am. I didn't know him well then; he was a big boy and I was a little girl. But, a good while later, when we were both at home on vacations, we came to know each other *very* well. I remember you, of course. . . . It seems strange to think you are—my uncle."

Doctor Ephraim had been holding her hand. Now he dropped it as if it were charged with electricity.

"Good night," he said, brusquely, and went out.

He was very tired, but he was fated to be interviewed again before that evening was over. Young Stone was his interviewer. He came soon after the arrival of Miss Ginn and seemed a trifle surprised to find the doctor at home.

"I imagined the measles would be still keeping you on the jump," he said. "How is Faith?"

She was asleep, so Doctor Ephraim told him, and she must not be disturbed.

"She has had a rather exciting afternoon," he added, and told briefly of the change of nurses, stating it as a fact and offering no explanation. Tom was astonished and, so it seemed to his friend, not a little disturbed.

"But why did Miss Dana leave so suddenly?" he asked. "I saw her yesterday and she didn't even hint that she thought of such a thing."

"Probably she didn't—then. She made up her mind this afternoon; or had it made up for her."

"What! What do you mean by that? Was she discharged?"

"Yes."

"Who did it; Parker?"

"No. Judge Copeland."

"The Judge! Why should he—" he started, stopped, and looked sharply across the table at his companion. "Why!" he exclaimed. "Was it—was I——"

Nye nodded. "Your name was mentioned," he said.

Tom continued to stare. Slowly the blood mounted to his face and his eyes began to flash.

"Do you mean to tell me," he demanded, "that Judge Copeland got rid of that nurse because she didn't object to my seeing Faith? Is *that* the reason?"

"That, or thereabouts."

"Well, I'll be hanged! Why—look here, does he think there was anything dishonorable, sneaking, about it? Does he?"

"We-ll, 'underhanded' was a word he used; also 'conspiracy.' . . . There, there! Hush! Be quiet, Tom. And sit down. Let's talk this over. I want to hear what you have to say."

The young man glared at him. "You do?" he said. "Well, I—I don't know exactly why I should talk it over with you. Copeland is the man I want to see. I'll talk to *him* right enough."

"Better talk to me first. After all, Tom, this *is* my house, and Miss Copeland just now is my patient. And —er—once or twice you have said you were my friend. If you meant it, then, everything considered, you will talk with me."

Tom hesitated. The doctor, leaning forward, tapped the table with his forefinger as he said, with emphasis:

"Being responsible for what goes on in this house I, naturally, expect my friends to tell me their side of the story. I have heard the other side."

This pointed statement had its effect. Stone's frown relaxed and he sat down again.

"You're right, of course, Doctor," he said. "I beg your pardon. I guess I didn't think of it that way."

"I thought you didn't. Now go ahead and tell me."

"Why, there isn't anything to tell. And, first of all, you've got to understand there hasn't been anything underhanded or dishonorable."

Evidently there had not been, from the somewhat unthinking viewpoint of the young people. Faith knew that Tom called to inquire about her, and had asked to see him. The nurse—as she told Doctor Nye—had been indulgent and, because the call seemed to have a favorable effect upon her patient rather than the contrary, had not objected to its almost daily repetition. But she had *not* told Doctor Parker, which Nye had distinctly told her she should do.

"So, you see, there is some excuse for the Judge's action in her case," said the doctor. "By the way, Tom, what would you have done if he had happened in while you were there?"

"Done? Nothing. Stayed there, of course."

"Hum. . . . Not long, I imagine. And Faith did not mention your calls to him!"

"No-o," with a reluctant shrug. "I suppose she imagined he might make a row. But it wasn't because she was afraid, or thought she was doing wrong, I tell you that. . . . The whole thing is ridiculous, Doctor Nye. Why on earth because my father and hers have always fought should she and I keep up the row—like—like a Kentucky mountain feud? And it's foolishness. We

are friends, she and I; have been for a long while. It is——"

Nye interrupted. "Never mind, Tom," he said. "I can guess the rest. Faith said about the same thing a little while ago. You are both right, too, from your standpoint. But it isn't *the* point just now. No matter who was to blame—and it looks as if Miss Dana was the most so—it was a mistake to keep it from Judge Copeland."

"Well, perhaps it was. I am sorry. . . . Yes, I am. But not ashamed, you understand. I shall go to him right away and tell him so."

"No, you won't. At least I hope you won't—yet."

"Why not?" indignantly.

"Because it will make more trouble and have a bad effect upon Faith. She—her quick and complete recovery—is the one and only real consideration just now. You can have it out with the Judge by and by if you want to, but until she is well enough to be taken home to her father's house, I don't want you to see her again. You mustn't."

Stone was still undecided. "It will look as if I were a frightened kid, afraid of a licking," he muttered.

"More like a man who has made a mistake and doesn't intend to make another, I should say."

"She won't see it that way."

'Yes, she will. I'll see that she does."

Tom, even yet, was not quite convinced. He did not answer. Doctor Ephraim spoke again and in a different tone.

"There is one other consideration," he said, firmly. "I have not mentioned it, because it is personal. This whole situation—Miss Copeland's and her father's presence in

this house—is—well, peculiar. I don't know that that has occurred to you, in all its peculiarity. It is an unpleasant situation for them, you must know that; Ostable has, I'm sure, dropped a few hints to that effect in your neighborhood. But perhaps you have not considered that it is quite as unpleasant for me. I wish to get it over with as quickly as possible. This foolishness of Miss Dana's—and I may as well tell you that I should have discharged her if the Judge had not—is bound to have some effect upon Faith. She has been over-excited and, unless I am very much mistaken, she will feel the reaction to-morrow. That means she must stay here a little longer than she otherwise would. Which is—unpleasant for us all. And so you won't, of course, see her again while she is here, and you won't have your talk with the Judge until she is in his house and out of this one. After that—well, then you may do as you please, of course."

Stone's expression was changing as he listened. Now it had changed completely. He rose.

"I see," he said. "I hadn't thought of it in that way. I'm mighty sorry, Doctor Nye. I wouldn't knowingly make more trouble for you for anything. And I have, of course. It's too bad. But I think you ought to know that Faith doesn't feel—she isn't—well, you see, of course she was—er—prejudiced against you; she couldn't help it, considering everything, her family and all. But she is very grateful to you now. And she——"

But the doctor would not let him finish. He, too, rose.

"Yes, all right, Tom," he said dryly. "Somebody—Johnson, I think—says that 'gratitude is a fruit of great cultivation.' And somebody else says it is expensive. It shouldn't be wasted. Good night."

Tom held out his hand. "Good night, Doctor," he said. "You can depend on me. I won't come here again until after she has gone. But you'll let me know how she is, won't you?"

"Yes. And I will explain that you are acting under my orders."

The following morning Faith was feeling the reaction which Doctor Nye had foreseen. She was, however, in a better condition than he had feared and there seemed no reason to apprehend any very serious setback. After paying her a brief visit and leaving instructions with the nurse, he went away to attend to his measles patients. He came home late for dinner, a fact of which Henry—now quite recovered from the brief burst of humility following his escapade with Mr. Batchelder—took pains to remind him.

"If this keeps on," declared Henry, "you won't be able to walk to see your sick folks; there'll be too many of 'em for that."

"Don't worry, Henry," said Doctor Ephraim. "It won't keep on."

"I was goin' to say," Mr. Payson continued, "that you'll have to wake up and buy an automobile."

"Go to sleep and buy one, you mean, don't you? They are cheaper in dreams."

"Huh! Some of 'em are cheap enough, anyhow. I bet you you could buy that car of Cap'n Mark's for mighty little money—pretty soon. He'd have sold it long ago, I cal'late, and bought another one, only all hands tease him so about its makin' so much noise that he hangs onto it so's to prove it's quiet. If they agreed *'twas* quiet he'd sell it in a minute. That wouldn't be a bad car for you, Doctor Eph. 'Twould advertise you, sort of. Folks

would know when you went by, and talk about you. Good as a brass band, that car would be."

The doctor smiled. "So far, Henry," he observed, "a band hasn't been exactly necessary, has it? I am occasionally mentioned hereabouts."

Henry Ward Beecher Payson scratched his head.

"Seems to me I have heard your name, now I come to think of it," he admitted. "Hello! here's old Copeland comin' again. Presume likely I might's well go out to the kitchen and shut the door afore he orders me to. Got so I'm expected to 'Ki-yi' and run for my kennel when he heaves in sight. Never mind, some of these days he'll get what he ain't lookin' for. I ain't what you'd call a pup, maybe, but I ain't lost *all* my teeth. I can bite fat yet."

He stumped away, growling. Copeland came in, saw his brother-in-law at the table, and nodded. The nod was returned. The Judge was on his way to the sitting room, but Nye spoke.

"Sorry, Judge, but you can't go in there now."

Copeland looked at him.

"Why not?" he demanded.

"Because she is asleep, and I don't want her disturbed. You can sit here and wait, if you like. I am going out."

The Judge hesitated. Then he seated himself at the other side of the table. The doctor rose. Copeland cleared his throat.

"Now—er—that we are both here," he said, "I—er—well, perhaps some explanation is due you concerning my action of—er—yesterday."

"Not a bit. We had a pretty clear understanding."

"Yes—yes—er—we did. But I feel that I owe you——"

"You owe me nothing."

"I should not have been so emphatic if it had not been that I object strongly to that young man."

"Tom Stone? Oh, Tom is a good boy. And an exceptionally clever engineer, I am told."

"He may be. I don't know anything about him. But I do know his father only too well. And I will not have Cyrenus Stone's son visiting my daughter."

"All right. There seems to be one subject upon which you and Cyrenus are likely to agree."

Copeland straightened in his chair.

"Agree!" he repeated, stiffly. "What do you mean by that?"

"Oh, just that Cyrenus may be as particular as you are, that's all. . . . I'm busy, Judge. Is there anything more?"

"Why—er—no. Of course I realize that his calls were merely a renewal of a boy and girl acquaintanceship. That is all, of course."

"All right."

"One moment—— When do you think my daughter may be well enough to be taken home?"

"By the end of the week, if all goes well."

The Judge was evidently surprised and just as evidently pleased.

"So soon!" he exclaimed. "I am very glad."

"Well, for the matter of that, so am I."

"You will oblige me by having your bill ready when she leaves. I shall pay it at once."

Nye had taken his hat from the rack. He turned

"You paid Miss Dana, didn't you?" he asked.

"Yes."

"And you will pay the Ginn woman. That is all you can pay for. I told you so before."

Copeland sprang to his feet. "That is nonsense!" he declared. "Do you suppose I shall accept all—all this as a favor? And from you, of all men? I am able to pay my bills."

"You are not able to pay this one."

"Nye, I—I positively refuse——"

"Copeland, you may refuse and be—hanged. Good day."

On Wednesday Parker was well enough to return to his practice and on the following Monday the Copeland limousine was brought up to the door of the Dillingham house and Faith, in the arms of the chauffeur and Henry Payson, was carried tenderly out and settled upon its cushions. Doctor Ephraim was away when this took place—had made it a point to be—but, when he came back, Henry told him of the exodus.

"She's gone, Faith has," said Henry. "Gone back to her own house, and I bet you the Judge is glad to get her there. . . . She left somethin' for you though, Doctor Eph," he added, with a confidential wink.

Nye looked at him. "Something for me?" he repeated. "What?"

Payson took an envelope from his pocket. "She smuggled this into my hand when I was helpin' lug her out," he said. " 'Give it to the doctor, please,' says she, whisperin' so's that chauffeur wouldn't hear her. I didn't know what 'twas, of course, but I took it. It's got your name on the outside, Doctor Eph. Here 'tis. Kind of funny up-and-down writin', ain't it?"

The doctor took the envelope. It was addressed to him. He frowned as he regarded it.

"Regular turnout to watch her go, there was," went on Henry. "Althy was gawpin' over her front fence and a couple of the Peasleys was on hand, and—eh? Don't you want to hear about it, Doctor?"

"Not now."

He went into the sitting room. There he tore open the envelope. He feared to find a check, or money; he thought it quite possible that Copeland had taken this means to get it into his hands. But there was nothing of the kind; merely a note from the girl herself.

"Dear Doctor Nye [Faith had written]: I wish I might talk with you instead of writing, but I am sure there will be no opportunity for that before I go. I have been thinking a great deal during this last week, and remembering a great deal, too. I remember perfectly well that when I was a little girl I loved my 'Uncle Eph' dearly. I can still remember going to ride with you behind the horse with the funny name—'Gooseberry,' wasn't it?—and some of the stories you used to tell me, almost word for word. Tom has spoken so often about you. He cannot say enough about your kindness to him and your faithfulness and skill during his mother's illness. I shall remember these things and 'Gooseberry' and the stories, and, most of all, the fact that but for you I should not be here now, writing this. These things I shall *never* forget. I suppose I shall not meet you again, or often at least, and for father's sake that may be best. But I shall think of you and always be very, *very* grateful.

"Your niece, "Faith Copeland."

Doctor Nye read this to the end. Slowly he walked

over to the wastebasket in the corner and, standing beside it, began to tear the sheet of note paper across. He had only begun, however, when he seemed to change his mind. He remained motionless for some seconds; then he put the partially torn sheet in his pocket and, walking to the window, stood there, his hands in his pockets, looking out.

And now the old quiet and dullness settled down once more upon Bayberry Lane, its sidewalks, its homes, and their inhabitants. For the few days following the departure of Faith Copeland and the nurse this condition, by contrast, seemed one of complete stagnation. No more comings and goings of limousines and less showy cars; no more deliveries of delicacies from the fruit shops or flowers from the greenhouses; no more calls from inquiring friends among the summer people. At the Dillingham house the sole visitors were Captain Mark Bearse, dropping in of evenings for his checker game, or Tom Stone coming to report progress on his bridge. Miss Bemis found it scarcely worth while to keep watch at the front window, and was therefore enabled to, as she said, "get caught up" with her housekeeping.

Henry Ward Beecher Payson grew almost pessimistic.

"Thunderation! it's deader'n dishwater, these days, ain't it, Doctor Eph?" he declared. "Been so everlastin' lively round here for a month or so that I almost forgot 'twas ever any other way. But now there ain't *no* excitement. Copeland tribe gone, measles all better or pretty nigh, summer folks' houses all open—all but the Powell one, and I understand that'll open up next week when Mrs. Powell gets here—hotels both runnin' full tilt. Everything there is to happen has happened already. Say, Doc-

tor Eph, if you see Bluey Batchelder around town anywheres you tell him I'm away, takin' a little trip to Europe or somewheres. He might be wantin' me to go on another cruise with him—and just now it's so dead dull that I don't know's I'd have the strength of mind to say no.

"The gang up to the post office was talkin' about the Powell place last night," he went on. "She ain't been here, Mrs. Powell ain't, for the last two seasons, but they say now she's comin' here to live right along, winter and summer. Seems queer for her to do that, anybody with as much money as she's got. Be fine for the town, though. She's a mighty nice liberal woman, Mrs. Powell is; and a good-looker, too. Why——"

He did not finish the sentence because just here his employer went into the other room. Henry looked after him and rubbed his chin, thoughtfully. Captain Mark opened the door and entered the house at that moment and to him Mr. Payson voiced his thought.

"Queer thing, that is," he observed. "Two or three times I've started to say somethin' about them Powells and he don't never seem to want to listen. Anybody'd think he had some sort of prejudice against 'em. Couldn't be that, though, 'cause Mrs. Powell nor her brother-in-law never come here till long after that church money business was over and done with. He couldn't know 'em, could he?"

"No, no," replied the captain, carelessly. "He was over in the war when Wentworth Powell bought the Nickerson house. Course he doesn't know 'em. Come! Lively, Henry! Roust out that checker board. He's licked me three games runnin' and it's time for my luck to change."

"Maybe he don't like the name of Powell," suggested Henry. "I'm that way sometimes. Some names kind of

make me sick, as you might say. No reason to it, but they do. I knew a feller name of Abubus Payne once—used to live here in town he did—and he ran for Selectman. He was all right enough, too, I guess, but I wouldn't vote for him 'count of his name. Abubus! Tut, tut, tut! What a name that is to christen on to a young one. Don't sound—well, it don't sound *healthy,* does it now, Cap'n Mark?"

But in spite of the Payson declaration that everything had happened that could happen, Ostable experienced another sensation at the end of that very week. It was not, of course, an aristocratic sensation like the accident to the daughter of Judge Daniel Webster Copeland, but to those immediately concerned it was crushing. Manuel Cash, a young Portuguese who lived in the settlement in the woods near the Roses and Dacostas, was drowned. He was a "boat fisherman," making daily trips to the cod banks in his little catboat, and, no one knew exactly how, one foggy day he fell overboard. His wife's younger brother, whose Christian name also was Manuel, heard him cry out and, coming alongside in a dory, dragged him from the water, but too late to save his life. He left a young wife and two children.

To Doctor Nye fell the sad task of visiting the Cash home and ministering to the widow. She had been a housemaid at the Powell cottage during the summers when the owners were in town, so Payson said.

"Mrs. Powell thought a sight of her, accordin' to tell," said Henry. "She'll feel real bad when she gets here and finds out what's happened. And two little children, too."

The doctor shook his head, sadly. "It's worse than that, Henry," he said. "There will be three shortly—very shortly."

The call came to him a few days later. He hastened to the little shanty in the woods. The two small Cashes were playing in the kitchen, which was also the dining room. In the queer, stuffy little parlor, with its gaudy chromos on the walls and its hideously upholstered furniture, were gathered a few women of the neighborhood. Manuel, the brother, was there also. The doctor went upstairs to his patient; Manuel's wife and Mrs. Gaspard were there awaiting him.

An hour later he came down again. The group in the parlor broke out with a voluble broadside of questions. He did not answer them.

"Where is Manuel?" he asked.

"In da other room," they told him.

The door to the kitchen was closed. His hand was on the knob, he had turned it—and then he paused.

Some one in the kitchen was speaking. A feminine voice it was, a full rich voice, soft, refined—the voice of a gentlewoman.

"Oh, I am so sorry, so sorry," it said. "I have just gotten here, the train was late. When I got to the house they told me. I came here at once. It is dreadful! Poor Mary, and the children! Is there—but of course there is—— What do they need first? What can I do?"

Doctor Nye opened the door. Manuel turned to look at him. So did the woman who had been speaking. Slowly, as she looked, the color left her face.

"Why—why—oh, *Ephraim!*" she gasped.

The doctor's face was as white as hers, but he bowed.

"How do you do, Mrs. Powell?" he said, quietly. "Well, Manuel, all's well. . . . It is a boy."

CHAPTER XI

WHEN, after supper that evening, Captain Mark Bearse came to the Dillingham house seeking revenge for his constantly lengthening string of defeats in the checker tournament, Henry Ward Beecher Payson informed him that his friend and conqueror was out.

"Went out about half past seven," said Henry. "Never said where he was goin', but I presume likely it's somewheres up in the latitudes of Portugal. I reminded him that you was liable to be around, but he said to ask you to excuse him to-night; he was busy and couldn't tell what time he might be home. He looked busy, too; all tuckered out, he was. Never ate no supper worth mentionin' and never said ay, yes or no to me all the time he was in the house. He'll kill himself along of them half-breeds, Doctor Eph will. When they ain't havin' measles they're havin' babies. There's a new young one up to that Cash house, made port this afternoon. I presume likely that's where the doctor is now."

They would have been very much surprised had they known where their friend actually was at that moment. He had called at the Cash house, but remained only a few minutes. Now, his hands in his coat pockets and his pipe between his teeth, he was striding along the beach below the bluff where Tom Stone had pursued him on a bicycle

on the occasion of their first meeting since his return to Ostable.

It was not an evening for a stroll by the sea. No group of summer men and maidens would have selected it as just the night for a beach party or a marshmallow toast. There was a moon, it is true, but it was hidden by a thick curtain of wet, clinging fog which, for moistening purposes, was almost as effective as a rain. The lights in the hotels and cottages were hidden, as was that of the lighthouse across the bay. A chill breeze was blowing. The long stretch of weed-strewn sand was lonely and depressing and deserted. And these were precisely the reasons why Ephraim Nye, himself depressed to the very depths, had chosen it as a place in which to tramp and think and try to decide what to do.

For the mocking devil of Fate, or coincidence, or whatever it might be—the tormenting, grinning demon which had used him as a butt and a plaything so often—had done it again. He had come back to Ostable, the community where he had been so popular and then so universally execrated, from which he had been dragged in disgrace to prison—he had come back there to make a new fight. Of all the places on earth he had deliberately chosen this place because, as Captain Mark Bearse had shrewdly surmised and characteristically expressed, it had "put a label" on him and he intended trying to make it take that label off. In one way the "label" of his native town meant little to him. Life, as a whole, meant little or nothing. He did not greatly care to live, but, living, he must keep an interest in something, and an open fight against public opinion in a town like Ostable promised to be interesting, perhaps even grimly amusing. There were ninety-nine

chances in a hundred against his winning, but that made little difference. It was the fighting itself which would be worth while.

But a fair stand-up fight against odds was what he had expected. To find a perverse imp of Destiny on the other side, striking one underhand blow after the other—that was unexpected and disheartening. He had come to Ostable determined to have absolutely nothing to do with Daniel Copeland or any one bearing the Copeland name. And then Faith had been, as he told her father, thrown in at his door. Having her there, in his house, under his care, seeing her, talking with her, stirring old memories, reviving old regrets and bitter resentments—it had been torture. There was no bitterness on his part against Faith herself. She, in the old days, had been a great favorite of his. But her presence had brought back the ghosts.

Well, she had gone, and the ghosts must be laid again, that was all. But, just as he had again squared his shoulders for the fight, down he went before this new blow. Out of the happiest period of his life, out of the time when that life held a glorious future instead, as now, merely a wrecked and wretched past, from the days of youth and confidence and hope and love came the one woman in all the world whom he had fervently prayed never to see again. Not that he had forgotten her, for he should never forget her. She was the one memory he should cherish always. But with all his heart he had hoped that she had forgotten him.

And yesterday, in the dirty, shabby kitchen of the Cash shanty, she had faced him, known him and called him by name. She, too, like him—but without his reason—for

no reason at all so far as he could see—had come to Ostable. And Henry said she was planning to live there permanently. It was unbelievable, it was overwhelming.

When he had known this woman she had been a girl and he a young man. Her name then was Katherine Minot. Her father was Corcoran Minot, the Boston banker, a fact which renders further statement concerning his wealth and social position quite unnecessary. He met her first during his senior year at Harvard. It was at a dance. He did not attend many dances, but he did this one and she was there. It is not in the least astonishing that he should have fallen in love with her. She was beautiful, charming and a great favorite. But it is somewhat surprising that she should have been so strongly attracted to him, the tall, young fellow with the tumbled hair and the quiet smile, who said so little and made no effort to be popular nor entertaining. He was good looking enough, and, when he chose to talk, was witty and original, but he was quite as likely not so to choose. Obviously to favorably impress the opposite sex was the very least of his desires and perhaps that is why that perverse sex was so impressed. At all events, in spite of his taciturnity, his brusque manner and his oddities, women found Ephraim Nye fascinating.

Katherine Minot liked him at that first meeting. They did not meet again, however, for several years. Her paths and her associates were not those of a young fellow working his way through medical college. When they next met he was an interne at the hospital and she was playing Lady Bountiful among the poor little folk in the children's wards. She had then, as when they met in Cambridge, a number of masculine followers, but no one of them was

especially favored. She had not married, she was not engaged, and, although all who knew her wondered who the lucky man might eventually be, and agreed that he would indeed be lucky, no one could yet point a finger with certainty in his direction. All of which goes to prove that Katherine Minot, like Ephraim Nye, was independent and accustomed to do her own thinking.

So these two met once more and, within the year, the fingers, hitherto hesitating, were pointing toward Doctor Ephraim. There was no public announcement of an engagement, but it was generally believed that an understanding existed between the two. Katherine's interest in the scraps of humanity in the children's ward was very keen and the doctor's interest in that ward was overwhelming. She was more beautiful than ever, sweet, gracious and radiantly happy. Doctor Nye seemed amazingly contented with life. His associates and the nurses smiled knowingly. With his certainty of a brilliant professional future and the prospect of Corcoran Minot's daughter for a wife, who wouldn't be happy, they wanted to know. Yet there was an obvious answer to this question. Mr. and Mrs. Corcoran Minot were by no means happy. They had but one daughter and they had, as was natural, planned for her. Doctor Ephraim Bassett Nye was not a part of those plans.

Then, as a patient, to that hospital came Fanny Copeland of Ostable.

Miss Copeland was, as Mrs. Shubal Bush explained to Aunt Lindy Pepper during their conversation of the evening following Doctor Ephraim's return, at that time an extremely pretty, attractive and very much spoiled young woman. In her native town and the adjoining towns she

was what the novelists so frequently—and people in real life so seldom—term a "belle." Life for her had been one good time after the other. She was accustomed to having her own way and, being persistent, usually got what she went after. She brought to the hospital her good looks, her vivacity and persistence as well as a set of nerves pretty well shaken by dancing much and sleeping little. Her own doctors had diagnosed her case as one requiring rest, care and special treatment.

Doctor Nye found her case an interesting one, but his interest was purely professional. Miss Copeland found him interesting in a more personal way. Flirting was one of her accomplishments, but to find a young man entirely impervious to her exercise of that art was rare—and intriguing. Like any rarity, it added to his attractiveness. Fanny very soon decided that she wanted Doctor Ephraim Nye, wanted him very much indeed. So she set about getting him. It did not take her long to learn of Katherine Minot and the rumors connecting the latter's name and that of the young physician. So far from discouraging Miss Copeland, these rumors merely made her more determined.

The Corcoron Minots had a friend named Christopher Powell, a bachelor, very wealthy and of a family securely established in Boston's best circles. He had long been classified as "E & D"—eligible and desirable—by parents of daughters approaching the marriageable age. So far he had followed the advice of our first President and avoided entangling alliances, but now, verging upon the forties, he had fallen a victim to Katherine. His name, his fortune, and himself could have been hers if she had said the word. Her father and mother would have

rejoiced had she said it, but apparently she was going to say "Ephraim Nye" instead. She had not, however, as yet said it openly. Therefore the Minots did not give up hope. Neither did Mr. Christopher Powell. Least of all, although from motives not in the least concerned with the Powells or Minots, did Fanny Copeland.

Doctor Nye had spoken with Katherine concerning his new patient. "A girl I used to know at home," he said. "Her case interests me." Katherine, visiting her juvenile friends in the hospital, was introduced by the doctor to Miss Copeland. The latter recognized in her charmingly gracious visitor an adversary whose defeat would demand every resource of strategy, minor and major. She began her campaign by being as fascinating as she knew how to be, and she had practiced much. She told Katherine of her liking for Doctor Nye. "He and I are such friends," she said "*old* friends, you know. We used to see *so* much of each other." She begged her visitor to repeat her visit. "Do come often, won't you?" she pleaded. "Any friend of his is sure to be a friend of mine." And, after Miss Minot's departure, she told Doctor Nye that she thought her perfectly entrancing. "I fell in love with her," she declared. Ephraim, guileless soul, was delighted to hear it, and carried the news to the lady of his heart.

So the visits were repeated, and always when the two were together Miss Copeland managed to be a bit more confidential. She was prettily confused when she spoke the doctor's name. She hinted at understandings in the past, at romantic passages, and she left to be inferred a great deal more than she said. Katherine was puzzled, and, in spite of herself, a little disturbed. She did not really believe, of course; she trusted her lover absolutely,

and, being frank and proud, did not deign to question. Yet she was troubled. She could not understand. And at home, always, quietly but surely, was exerted the pressure in favor of Christopher Powell.

Fanny's campaign was progressing as she meant it to progress. And she was not in the least conscious of doing anything wrong. She was, by this time, madly infatuated with Ephraim Nye, and correspondingly jealous of Katherine Minot. She was fighting for the man she loved and consequently ruthless:

> "For never did battle of man compare
> With merciless feminine fray."

She played each card carefully, and when the time came led her ace of trumps. She wrote a letter to her rival, a pitiful, heart-broken letter. "He was—and is—everything to me," she wrote. "Now I am beginning to believe that you are going to take him from me. I want him to be happy, his happiness is dearer to me than anything else in the world. But, ah! what—*what* will become of *me!* Don't tell him I have written this. Promise me he shall never see this letter. I don't know why I am writing it; I am desperate, I suppose, and sick and *so* miserable. But you *won't* tell him, will you? I trust to your honor not to tell him."

Katherine did not tell him, nor did she answer the letter. But she could not be—it was not humanly possible to be—quite the same in her attitude toward Ephraim Nye. He noticed the change and he could not understand it. Also he watched the frequency of Christopher Powell's calls at the Minot house. He began to hear rumors, and they troubled him. He did not believe, but he could not

help feeling a little jealousy. The time had come, as it comes so often in affairs like these, for a frank conference, whole-souled confession, and a consequent renewal of mutual understanding and trust.

The inevitable alternative was more and more misunderstanding, a crisis, and a break. And in the case of Ephraim Nye and Katherine Minot it was the break which came.

Mr. Minot had not been well that winter. His physicians recommended a sea voyage in Southern waters. Among the other multitudinous possessions of Christopher Powell was a yacht, a beautiful craft, luxurious, fast and commodious. Her owner immediately put her at his friend's disposal. He invited the Minots, all three, to be his guests for a cruise to the West Indies. The invitation was accepted. But when Miss Minot told Doctor Nye of the acceptance he was not happy.

"Why, Ephraim," she remonstrated, "why shouldn't I go? Father is ill and mother and he need me. You're not going to be selfish, are you?"

He hesitated. "It isn't selfishness," he said. "At least I hope it isn't. There are other reasons why I think you should not go—with Mr. Powell."

"Indeed? What are they?"

"I think you should not put yourself under such an obligation to him, everything considered. And—well, I don't like you to be with him to that extent."

"With Chris Powell! Why, I have known him all my life, pretty nearly."

"Yes. I realize that. But——"

"Don't you trust me?"

"You know I do."

"I certainly expect you to. Particularly, if I am willing to trust you with this very attractive patient of yours."

"Attractive patient? What patient?"

"Can't you imagine? Oh, Ephraim, don't pretend you don't know who I mean. That is silly."

"You can't mean Fanny—Miss Copeland! . . . Katherine! Why, she is an old friend. I have known her——"

"Perhaps as long as I have known Chris Powell. And as for the friendship—well, I am quite aware of that."

"Katherine! Why, this isn't like you at all. She is under my care, professionally."

"I am beginning to think it might be quite as well if she were under the care of some one else. Yes, I think she had best be."

"Why, Katherine! I can't understand this. When I took her case, I—why, it is my duty——"

"I have a duty to my father, it seems to me."

"Your father; yes, I know that. But you haven't any to Powell. It is his hospitality you are accepting. If it were not his yacht, if you were not going with him—— Surely, there are other means of travel."

"And there are other doctors for your charming friend at the hospital."

An interview like this is not likely to end pleasantly. Yet this one might have ended less unpleasantly if it had been permitted to go on. They were interrupted. Mrs. Minot entered the room to say that Doctor Nye was wanted at the hospital immediately. A patient—a Miss Copeland—had suddenly become worse, and the nurse begged him to come at once. He had no opportunity to speak with Katherine alone before leaving, nor, to be truthful, did she seem anxious to afford him that oppor-

tunity. He went, troubled and hurt, little realizing that he and the woman he loved were not to meet again until that afternoon, long afterward, when they faced each other in Manuel Cash's house at North Ostable.

For Fanny Copeland *was* ill, seriously ill. There was no pretense this time. The plans and stratagems and struggles of her love affair, the first real love of her life, had put too great a strain upon her weakened nerves and they broke completely. She was in a critical condition and for a week Ephraim Nye fought for her reason and, it might be, her life.

He sent a hasty note to Katherine, sent it by a messenger who delivered it to the Minot butler, who, in turn—Miss Minot being out—handed it to Mr. Minot. And he, himself a semi-invalid, put it in the pocket of the coat he was wearing. A servant found it there after his death, a year later, and tossed it into the fire.

So Katherine received no word from Ephraim Nye and imagined him as resentful and unreasonable, imagined all sorts of things, and was hurt and grieved and deeply offended. Before the end of the week she conquered her pride sufficiently to telephone, and the hospital attendant who answered the phone said that Doctor Nye was very busy with a critical case and could not be disturbed. The case, he informed her, upon request, was that of a Miss Copeland.

On the following Saturday the Powell yacht sailed for the West Indies and Corcoran Minot, his wife and daughter, were on board, as was, of course, Mr. Powell himself. And Ephraim Nye, when told of the sailing, went to his room and, sitting down, tried to face the future which

held for him nothing—nothing except his work and a memory.

He did not give up all hope, not immediately. He wrote her a long letter, a letter in which he asked her pardon for offending by even daring to seem distrustful or jealous. He wrote her that he trusted her wholly, that he loved her with all his heart and soul, and still believed that she loved him. This letter—he sent it to Havana in care of the yacht—was returned to him unclaimed. The Minots did not return to Boston for many months. Before these months were over he read in a Boston paper the announcement of the marriage of Katherine Minot to Christopher Powell. Not long after that he married Fanny Copeland and, because she so earnestly wished it, he bought Doctor Blodgett's practice and came with his wife to Ostable to live. Then followed the years of life there, of growing popularity and seeming contentment and prosperity, of secret worries and increasing forebodings; then the crash, his wife's death, and then the dreadful nightmare of trial and prison. After that the war, the armistice, and his determination to return to Ostable and fight for the fight's sake.

All this, or such of it as he knew, he rehearsed and rerehearsed as he tramped the beach in the foggy blackness of that summer night. And ever the question remained to be answered: what should he do now? She would be here always; he and she would inevitably meet from time to time; she would hear his miserable story, with all the embellishments of local gossip—probably had heard it long before. But she had not known—that was evident—of his return to Ostable. The expression upon her face when they met was proof sufficient that the meeting was as great

a surprise and shock to her as it had been to him. What should he do? Give it all up and go away to make another beginning elsewhere? Or stay and fight it out? To go would be equivalent to surrender, but what of it? She would understand why he went: to save her from the necessity of seeing him daily. . . . No! . . . No, she would not really understand. She would think that, ashamed and guilty, he had run from her like a coward.

The question, nevertheless, was still unanswered when, some time after midnight, he entered the Dillingham house and went quietly to his room. It was unanswered at breakfast time, when Henry again commented upon his lack of appetite and declared that, so far as results were concerned, "I might as well be dishin' up vittles for one of them canary birds. Yes, and better," he added, "for bird-seed ain't so expensive nor nigh so much trouble as fish hash."

That evening Captain Mark Bearse was on hand early, but the checker game was a farce. The captain not only won, but won so easily that he took no satisfaction in the victory.

"My glory!" he exclaimed, in disgust. "What did you make that last move for, Eph?"

Doctor Eph gazed absently at the board.

"Eh?" he queried. "Oh, I had to move somewhere, Mark."

"But you didn't have to move into exactly the place that would lick you, did you?"

His friend smiled wearily. "Why, I don't know, Mark," he observed. "That would be characteristic, wouldn't it?"

The significance of this was quite lost on the captain. He snorted again.

"No, it wouldn't," he declared. "You just did it without thinkin' . . . and you ain't thinkin' now, either."

The weary smile faded; Nye shook his head. "Oh, yes, I am," he answered.

"I know better. There! See? Now you're beat."

"Yes; I do seem to be. Congratulations."

"I don't want any congratulations. I want to beat you when you're fightin', not when you're quittin'."

The doctor seemed to find food for reflection in this statement. He regarded his irate opponent for some moments without speaking. Then he said slowly:

"You haven't much use for a quitter, have you, Mark?"

Captain Mark grinned. "Not much," he admitted. "But I take that all back, so far as you're concerned, Eph. You wasn't payin' attention to the game, that's all. I don't think there is anything on earth that would make you quit. Maybe that's why I like you, durn you."

Doctor Eph made no comment. He was idly stirring the checkers with his fingers. The captain spoke again.

"Do you know," he went on, "you've been a kind of—of an example to me, as you might say."

"I have been an example to a good many. It is my specialty. 'The fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge' on my account, Mark."

"Oh, go along with your Shakespeare! I don't mean that kind of example, and you know it. What I mean is that it's always been a solid comfort to me to see you stand up and face the music. And the—the mournfuller the tune the more lively you kept step. . . . But there!

What am I wastin' my time pattin' you on the head for? Will you play another game now; and *play* it?"

Nye straightened in his chair. "Yes," he said, shortly, "I will play the game. Much obliged, Mark."

"Nothin' to be obliged for. I'll lick you again, if I can. . . . Well, here she goes! It's your move."

That checker game, however, was not destined to be finished. It was well under way and the captain was rapidly losing his men when footsteps were heard on the walk outside. It was Henry Ward Beecher Payson who heard them; the others were too busy with their game. Henry, who, having finished his dishwashing, had been sitting in a rocker in the dining room, dozing over the *Ostable Enterprise,* rose to his feet.

"Say!" he called. "Ain't that somebody comin'? Yes, 'tis. Somebody's comin' up the path. Who in time——"

There was a knock at the door. Instead of answering it Henry stumped to the sitting room.

"Now who do you cal'late that is?" he queried, in an aggrieved whisper. "Just get set down, all hands of us do, and—and shipshape and com'table, and somebody has to roust us out again. More sick Portygees, I bet you! . . . Yes, yes, *yes!* I hear ye!" as the knock was repeated. "Now who do you suppose that is, Doctor Eph?"

The doctor did not answer, but Captain Mark, whose patience was usually set on a hair trigger, answered for him.

"What's the use of standin' there supposin'?" he demanded. "Look alive and go and see who 'tis. Then you won't *have* to suppose."

Mr. Payson regarded him with strong disapproval. "I don't know's as I'm called on to obey orders from every

Tom, Dick and Harry from here to Joppy," he observed. "Old Copeland he comes and all but kicks me out into the kitchen, and I'm expected——"

Doctor Nye interrupted. "See who is knocking," he said. Henry looked rebellion, but spoke no more of it. Instead he stumped to the outer door and opened it.

"Well?" the pair in the sitting room heard him demand, ungraciously. "What—?" His tone changed to one of considerable surprise and most unwonted politeness. "Why—why, good evenin', ma'am," they heard him stammer. "Yes—yes, ma'am, he's here. Step right in. I'll speak to him. . . . Er—er—they ain't nobody sick up to your house, is there? I hope there ain't."

A woman's voice replied, a voice which Captain Bearse did not recognize. He turned to Nye.

"Who on earth's that?" he whispered. "I——" Then he stopped short, because of the expression upon his friend's face.

"Who is it, Eph?" he repeated, after a moment. "What's the matter?"

The doctor did not answer. Henry appeared in the doorway, a somewhat excited but most genteel Henry.

"Doctor Ephraim," announced this Henry, the gentility freighted with importance, "Mrs. Powell has come to see you. Mrs. Christopher Powell. Can you see her now; or shall I ask her to set down?"

Nye's facial expression was extraordinary, so the captain thought. Bearse was surprised and interested. The sister-in-law of the rich Wentworth Powell was distinctly a figure in Ostable. Her summer "cottage," which she had inherited at the time of his death along with a fortune variously estimated in the late hundred thousands or the

early millions, was the finest residence in the township. Her wealth, her social position, her travels abroad, and now her return to Ostable, all these had been much discussed during the past week. They had furnished Mrs. Hopkins and the captain with a topic of conversation for breakfast, dinner and supper. Of course this call of hers upon Doctor Nye was concerned with the Cashes, for Manuel Cash's widow had been a household servant in the Powell cottage even while Wentworth Powell lived. But, nevertheless, for Mrs. Christopher Powell to visit the house of Ephraim Nye, M. D., was an event, and one which might mean much for the latter's professional future in the community. Yet Doctor Nye did not appear happy nor expectant. He had risen to his feet, and the look upon his face was more like that of one facing the shock of bad news rather than good. He looked paler, and older, and drawn. And he did not speak.

Henry tried again. "Shall I tell her to set down and wait, Doc?" he repeated.

The doctor hesitated a moment longer. Then he drew a long breath.

"Ask her to come in, of course," he said, quietly. . . . "Mark, I—well, I'm afraid our game——"

But Bearse was already on his feet. "Why, sartin sure, of course, Eph," he broke in. "I—er—I was just goin' anyway. Don't you pay any attention to me. My hat's out in the dining room, and—oh, good evenin', Mrs. Powell. Good evenin'. Real glad to see you back in Ostable. We'd heard you'd come."

She had entered the sitting room and they met at the doorway.

"Why, it is Captain Bearse, isn't it?" she exclaimed. "I am so glad to see you. And how is your sister?"

"She's nicely; real smart, thank you. Well, Eph, I'll run along. See you later. Good night."

He was going, but she detained him.

"I am afraid I have interrupted your game, Captain Bearse," she said. Nye was already picking up the checkers. "You were playing, weren't you?"

"Eh? Oh, yes, we was playin' a few checkers, but it didn't amount to anything. We play about every other night, pretty nigh. He generally beats me, though."

"Does he? . . . And you play as often as that. . . . Then," she looked at him with an expression which seemed to him almost of wonder; "then you are his friend," she added.

Captain Mark had heard a similar remark from a good many people during the past few months. It always affected him like a challenge, a challenge to be promptly accepted. His eyes snapped.

"I used to be, and I am, and I always cal'late to be, as long as he's willin'," he announced crisply.

She smiled then.

"I am quite sure he will always be willing," she said. "Thank you."

When he reached home he told his sister about it. "But what in the nation did she thank me for?" he asked.

"Why, for tellin' her, I presume likely," suggested Mrs. Hopkins.

"Humph! She needn't have. I'd have told her I was Eph Nye's friend any time—and welcome; she can bet her spare change on that! Yes, or anybody else. . . . She's just as good lookin' as ever, Matilda. Hasn't grown any

older in the last two, three years. How do those summer women do it?"

Mrs. Hopkins sniffed. "I don't know," she observed; "but I do know that there's nobody like a fifty-year-old widower to notice that they do."

CHAPTER XII

IN the sitting room of the old Dillingham house Ephraim Nye and Katherine Powell faced each other for the second time in so many years. After the captain's departure she turned to him.

"Doctor Nye," she began, hesitatingly. "I—I suppose my coming here must seem strange to you. It does, of course."

She paused. She was by far the more agitated of the two, outwardly at least. His lips were tightly set, but when he spoke his tone was coldly polite, nothing more.

"Sit down, Mrs. Powell," he said. "Pardon me just a moment."

He crossed the room and closed the door to the dining room. She had taken the chair which he indicated and he, returning, sat down in that which he had been occupying, behind the table with the checkers upon it.

"Now, Mrs. Powell," he said.

She was looking at him and her own lips trembled.

"I—I came," she began. "I came——"

"You came to see me about Mrs. Cash, of course. Henry tells me she is one of your servants."

"Yes. Yes, she is. That is, she was with us—with me when my brother was alive—and since. So was her husband, Manuel."

He nodded. "Yes," he said. "Well, Mrs. Powell, I am glad to be able to tell you that Mrs. Cash is getting on well, remarkably well, considering the shock of her hus-

band's drowning. You have nothing to fear on her account, I feel sure."

"I—I am glad."

"Naturally. . . . Is there anything else I can tell you concerning her case?"

She hesitated. Then she leaned forward.

"Ephraim," she said, impulsively. "I did not come to see you about her."

"No?" he queried.

"Oh, you know I didn't! I came because—because I *had* to come. Ever since yesterday—ever since you and I met there in that house, I have been thinking, and wondering—and—and—Ephraim, why are you here? What are you doing here, in this town?"

He answered calmly and quite as if the question were expected.

"It was my native town," he replied. "I used to practice here. I am doing the same thing now."

"Yes—yes, I know, but—oh, of *course* I know it was your native town! I know all that. Who should know it better than I? But why have you come back to it? Why are you in Ostable? Ephraim, please tell me."

He lifted a checker from the board and dropped it again.

"Surely you were told of my being here," he said.

"No. I didn't know until I met you—there in that room yesterday. We had just arrived, and they told me of Manuel's drowning, and about poor Mary. I had the chauffeur drive me over there at once and—well, you know what happened."

He nodded. "I see," he said. "Odd that my name was not mentioned."

"Perhaps it was. I believe some one did say something about a Doctor Nye, but I did not pay much attention to it. I did not connect the name with—with you. I had not heard a word. And when you opened that door, I——"

She did not finish the sentence. He lifted and dropped the checker once more.

"I imagine you may have heard more about me since," he suggested.

"Yes. I have heard a great deal, of course."

"Of course. And interesting, I am sure."

His tone was frigidly sarcastic, and she colored and drew back. But only for the moment.

"Oh, Ephraim," she cried, "don't speak to me in that way It seems to me that I have a right to be interested in—in an old friend. I came here to—to—oh, you must understand why I came!"

"I understand perfectly that you should not have come. This house—my house—is the one place you should not be, now or at any time."

"Why not? But that doesn't matter. Ever since—oh, I have been thinking of nothing else. I have heard so *many* stories."

"If the neighborhood vigilance committee is on duty to-night you will soon hear some new ones, I imagine."

"What do you mean? . . . Oh, never mind! I want to know the truth. Why did you come back to Ostable? Please tell me."

He toyed with the checkers for a moment longer. Then he raised his eyes and looked at her.

"Why should I tell you?" he asked.

"Why should you tell me? . . . Ephraim!"

"Exactly. Why should I tell you? You say you are interested because of our old friendship. That friendship belongs to the past. It is dead and buried and it cannot be resurrected. You must realize that."

"I don't realize any such thing. We—we never can be friends in—in the way we once were; that belongs to the past, as you say. But we can be friends, the other sort of friends."

"No. Mrs. Powell, I came back here to Ostable to practice medicine because—well, because the situation here seemed to offer some novel features which the rest of the world did not offer. And I craved novelty, or I thought I did. It promised to be interesting and so far it has lived up to its promise. This latest development is somewhat superfluous, I admit. If I had known that the Mrs. Powell of the Nickerson estate was—who she has turned out to be, I—well, I should not have come, of course."

"Then you did not know?"

He smiled. "Did you imagine that I did?" he asked. "I had heard the name of Wentworth Powell. Naturally, I did not connect it with that of your husband."

"Wentworth was his older brother. He bought the Nickerson place eight years ago. He is dead now. I spent several summers here after my husband died. . . . You knew that I was a widow?"

He nodded. "I had heard of Mr. Powell's death," he said.

"Yes. He has been dead five years. . . . Oh, Ephraim, how strange it is, you and I coming here to live, and neither knowing!"

He smiled, but it was not a pleasant smile.

"It would have been more strange," he observed, "for

me to come—knowing. . . . And for you also, I can imagine."

"Yes . . . yes, I suppose so . . . I don't know."

"It is not too late, however. I can go away."

"Go away! Where?"

"That doesn't matter, does it? I have been considering the question ever since yesterday. It might on some accounts be very much better for me to go."

"Why? Because I am here?"

"Yes."

"Do you hate me as much as all that? I—Ephraim, I have never felt resentment against you. I was hurt, deeply hurt, and I did not understand, but I never hated you."

"Nor I you. But that is scarcely worth discussion now, is it? It is dead and buried, like the rest. If I had decided to go away it would have been because I was afraid of something just like this, your coming here to-night."

"But I came to see you, to have you tell me the truth about—about all the stories I have heard. They have told me so many things. About your living here alone, and working among the Portuguese and—and the poor people. About your having almost no friends and—and . . . I wanted to know why you did it, and if it was true."

"Well, you know now. It is true."

"But you have *some* friends. Captain Bearse said——"

"Oh, yes! Mark is a friend of mine. He is a reckless individual and not over particular. Then there is Henry."

"Henry Payson? The one-legged man who opened the door for me? Yes, they said he worked for you here. But they speak of him as a perfectly dreadful creature!"

"Oh, he is! That is why he and I were attracted to each other. . . . There, Mrs. Powell, I really think you should

go. If my righteous and godly neighbors saw you come you may be sure they are watching the clock at this minute. You must go now. And," with deliberate emphasis, "you must never come here again."

He rose, but she remained seated. She was regarding him intently.

"You have changed," she said. "You are very bitter. I understand, of course. But I am so sorry. And the rest of it—all the terrible stories I had heard before? I wish—I suppose I cannot expect you to tell me the truth about those?"

He did not answer. She went on.

"When I heard them I would not believe," she said. "Of course I wouldn't. We were in Venice at the time and some one in Boston wrote my husband and sent the newspaper clippings. I was furious. I said I knew you and that those things were lies. Then we heard of the trial and—and all the rest. Even then I would not believe."

Still he did not speak. He was looking at her, though, and seemed to be waiting.

"But, by and by, I heard more and—and——"

"And you believed, at last."

"I don't know. I can hardly believe even yet. But they told me you admitted it. They said you would give no explanation at all. And then—and then——"

He interrupted. "Mrs. Powell," he said, "what they told you was true. I was sent to prison and served my term there. I am back here in my native town, with the distinction of being the local jailbird. It *is* a distinction, for we have no other at present; my only rival, a half-breed gentleman who robbed henyards, died a few months

ago. I am alone in—in my glory. That is why I suggest that your visiting me is unwise, and why I must insist on your going."

She rose now and faced him. There were tears in her eyes.

"Oh, I am so sorry for you," she cried. "Oh, Ephraim, I am *so* sorry."

He smiled once more. "Your pity is humbly acknowledged—with thanks," he said.

She shook her head sadly. "You are very hard," she said. "But it shall not make any difference. Whatever the memory of our old friendship may or may not be to you, to me it is—it is the most precious thing in my life. I came here to tell you that I was your friend and should always be. And, now that I have seen you and we have had this talk, I am more determined than ever. Ephraim, you are not going away from Ostable because I have come here, are you?"

"No, I am not."

"I am glad of that."

"I am going to stay because—well, because I was reminded a few minutes ago that quitter was merely another word for coward. Just now I feel a certain prejudice against adding 'coward' to my other pet names. I came here to fight, and I shall fight it through. But *you* must not be concerned in that fight. Your name must not be connected with mine. You must not let any one know you have ever known me and you must not see me nor speak with me again—unless in the way of business in connection with your servant."

Again she shook her head, and now she, too, smiled.

"I am afraid you can't help yourself, my friend," she said.

"You are not my friend. You can't afford to be. And I shall not let you."

"You can't help yourself. Why you are here, wasting your life when you might be doing so much elsewhere, I cannot understand. I suppose I never shall. But I know you need friends and I think I can make my friendship help you. . . . Oh, I can be stubborn, too, when it is necessary. Now I am going."

"Mrs. Powell——"

"You may call me that, if you insist, but I shall call you Ephraim."

For the first time his calm was shaken. His agitation showed in his face and voice.

"You must not," he declared, fiercely. "You will make it harder, that is all. You may drive me away in spite of everything. Don't you see? You can't help me—and you will only hurt yourself."

She smiled once more. "Good night, Ephraim," she said.

Henry Payson had gone up to bed. As the doctor opened the outer door a splash of rain beat against it. Mrs. Powell saw it.

"Oh, dear!" she cried. "It is raining and I brought no umbrella."

"But—didn't you come in your car?"

"No, I walked."

"Walked? . . . Well, that was prudent. You do realize the value of public opinion, after all . . . and chauffeurs, I suppose, are like other people and will talk."

She was offended, as he had meant her to be; but she divined his intention.

"No, you can't make me angry," she said. "And you may lend me an umbrella."

He hesitated. Then, from the closet, he took an umbrella and his own hat and coat.

"I will walk home with you," he said.

She looked at him. "You need not," she protested. "I know Ostable and I am not in the least afraid."

He shrugged his shoulders. "If you did know Ostable," he observed, "you would know that the real test of bravery is to be seen in my company. However, it is late and very dark, so you will be reasonably free from that risk. Come."

The mile and a half to the Nickerson gate they walked almost in silence. She spoke once or twice but he scarcely answered. At the gate she thanked him. He turned to her.

"Mrs. Powell," he said, "I want you to understand that I meant all I said. I am obliged for your interest in me and the offer of your friendship, but you must not see me again."

"It is for my sake you say that, I suppose?"

"Certainly. To everything respectable in Ostable I am taboo. I am the town leper, and the town will tell you I deserve to be. You know what happened to Father Damien."

"I rather think you are the Father Damien. Mary Cash told me many things to-day. You have friends in her neighborhood, at least."

"I know that you mean to be kind. We were—well, our old friendship, to which you were good enough to refer——"

"Can never be again; of course I know that. We were young then."

"And now one of us is a hundred at least, and—what he is. And you are what you are. No friendship, of any kind, is possible between us."

"Nonsense! Wicked nonsense!"

"No; sense. Sense and sanity. But—thank you, and good night—Katherine."

Henry Payson heard his step upon the path and opened the door of the Dillingham house. Henry was arrayed in a cotton nightgown and his face expressed intense indignation.

"Why, Henry!" exclaimed Nye. "You are up again; eh?"

"Up!" repeated Mr. Payson, shrilly. "Yes, I be. Rousted out of bed, I was, about ten minutes ago. And I've got the darndest thing to tell you. Seems as if you and me was possessed with the Portygee plague, as you might say. Another one of them Dacosta young ones is down sick with the colic morbus or somethin', and nothin' will do but you've got to go streakin' down there right off. I told 'em you was tired to death, hadn't had no sleep scarcely, and—eh? What did you say?"

Doctor Nye was taking his medicine case from the shelf.

"I said 'Thank God,' " he replied.

"Eh? *What!* What you thankin' God for? Do you realize you've got to walk two mile in the rain and be busy, like as not, the rest of the night?"

"Yes. That is why I am thankful. Good night, Henry."

CHAPTER XIII

THE Dacosta colic episode interfered not only with the sleep of Doctor Ephraim Nye and Henry Ward Beecher Payson, but also interfered with and deferred a pretty thorough catechizing to which Henry had planned to subject his employer. Mr. Payson, of course, had been tremendously impressed by the visit of Mrs. Christopher Powell. He knew why she had come to the Dillingham house—in a general way, he knew; she had come there, of course, to discuss the affairs of Mrs. Manuel Cash and the little Cashes. But he wanted something more specific; he wanted particulars. Loaded with those he saw himself crowing over the group at the post office, or dropping a few firecrackers in the path of Althea Bemis. He pictured interviews similar to this:

Miss Bemis *(sarcastically)*: "Well, how's the great Doctor Ephraim Bassett Nye gettin' on these days? Busy as usual, doin' nothin' and gettin' twice that for it, I suppose?"

Mr. Payson *(loftily)*: "There, there, Althy! Don't bother me, I've got too much on my mind as 'tis. Wear ourselves all out takin' care of Dan Copeland's folks, and no sooner get them cured and fixed up than along comes Mrs. Chris Powell and all her tribe to be attended to. Course there's another doctor in town—but no, nobody will do *her,* of course, but Doctor Eph. 'I know I'm particular,' says she, 'but I've been all over this world and

when it comes to doctorin',' she says, 'the best is the only kind that satisfies me. Let the common run go where they want to, but as far as I'm concerned,' says she, 'it's Doctor Nye or nobody.' . . . Good-by, Althy. Sorry I can't stop to talk any longer, but you see how 'tis with us nowadays. *I've* got to hustle."

(Exit Mr. Payson, strutting importantly, leaving Miss Bemis crushed and gasping.)

Filled with pleasant anticipations of this kind, Henry found it hard to wait for a favorable opportunity to question the doctor. But when, at last, that opportunity came, it brought only disappointment. Nye refused to discuss the visit of Mrs. Powell. What was worse, he ordered his hired man not to mention that visit to a soul.

"But, Doctor Eph," pleaded Henry, "it's good advertisin' for you. Them Powells are the biggest kind of big-bugs."

Doctor Nye did not appear impressed. "I had an idea that I was sufficiently advertised already," he observed.

"Hey? Not that way, you ain't. Why, you don't understand, Doctor Eph. If Saint Peter himself come to this house—if there was some of his folks sick, you know; I mean if such a thing were possible——"

He hesitated. Nye, filling his pipe, put in a word.

"His mother-in-law once had a fever of some sort, I believe," he suggested.

"Sho! She did, eh? I want to know! Well, all right, if he came here to get you to go and 'tend to her it wouldn't stir up much more talk in Ostable than Mrs. Chris Powell's comin' here would. And the right kind of talk, too. Why, I remember when Wentworth Powell bought that place of old Cap'n Lorenzo Nickerson's. The

price he paid for it kept all hands talkin' for a month pretty nigh. And the talk would have lasted longer only that it switched around to the money he was spendin' fixin' it up. I never see Mr. Chris Powell, of course. He died afore his widow come here to live along with his brother. But from what I hear *he* was a fine liberal-handed man, too. Bluey Batchelder knows consider'ble about him. His yacht come into Orham harbor one summer when Bluey was over there workin' at the cold-storage fish house. Mrs. Powell wan't with her husband aboard the yacht; she was to home or over in Europe or somewheres. But he had a gang of men, rich friends of his, cruisin' with him, and, 'cordin' to Bluey, money wan't no object to any of 'em. Tut, tut, tut! Jerushy, don't talk! Whew!"

Doctor Nye did not talk. He lighted his pipe instead. Mr. Payson went on, the wistful light of memory in his eyes.

"Bluey got a chance to go aboard that yacht one time," he continued. "He fetched a mess of mackerel aboard for the steward. The owner and his crowd was all ashore and the steward showed Bluey around. 'Cordin' to his tell that yacht had enough high-toned stuff in her manifest to—to float her in, pretty nigh. The steward—he must have been a good-hearted generous sort of fellow, like his boss—he says to Bluey, he said, 'Do you like champagne?' Bluey says, 'Yes. What's it taste like?' 'Some folks have to learn to like it,' says the steward. 'I always had the name of bein' a quick scholar,' says Bluey. Well—he, he, he! that's how it started. He, he! Oh, dear! Well, some people have all the luck, don't they, Doctor Eph . . . eh? What did you say?"

"Nothing, Henry."

"Oh, I see! Yes—yes. Bluey vows he'll never forget that steward. If ever there comes a chance, he says, for him to pay back some of that man's kindness he'll do it. He couldn't pay it then, you see, because when they let him out of the town lock-up the yacht had gone. But you can see what a high-toned man that Mr. Chris Powell was, can't you?"

"Perfectly, Henry."

"Yes. And his wife she's just as fine. In a different way, of course, but just as generous and interested in makin' other folks happy. Now when Althy Bemis finds out she's been to this house there'll be some talk stirrin', you bet. Course we—you and me, Doctor Eph—*we* know she come on account of them Cashes, but there's no need for Althy to know that. You leave it to me. I'll let that Bemis woman think that——"

"Henry."

"Yes, Doctor Eph."

"If you mention, or even hint, a word of Mrs. Powell's coming here, I shall—well, you and I will sever diplomatic relations."

"Eh? We'll do what?"

"We'll part company. Understand? You're not to speak of it to any one."

"Oh, Doctor Eph, you don't really *mean* it?"

"I certainly do."

"Tut, tut, tut! Well, all right. I'll keep still because you order me to. But, I declare, I do think——"

"Think as much as you like, but don't speak."

So Mr. Payson, loyal even in the depths of disappointment, remained silent concerning Mrs. Powell's call. To

Captain Mark, when he came, Nye issued similar commands. The captain accepted them, although he, too, thought his friend over scrupulous.

"That's rubbish, Eph," he declared. "There's nothin' to be ashamed of in havin' a woman like Mrs. Chris Powell come to see you. You ought to be proud. So had she, for that matter."

The doctor regarded him in silence for a moment. Then he said, slowly, "Mark, if you weren't fool enough to be a friend of mine I should probably kill you. As it is, suppose we change the subject—and keep it changed."

Bearse, of course, did not understand, but he did not mention the Powell name to Ephraim Nye for many a day. He thought and speculated much, but, being a man of common sense, he kept his speculations to himself. And he bade his sister tell no one of his encounter with Katherine Powell at the Dillingham house the evening of the interrupted checker game.

It was inevitable that the doctor and Mrs. Powell should meet again, and soon, and to that next meeting Nye looked forward with apprehension. What would be her attitude toward him? Would she be sensible, or would she foolishly allow pity for him and sentimental memories of a time when she had imagined that she loved him to influence that attitude? Would she be distantly formal, as all Ostable would naturally expect her to be, considering who she was and what he had been? Or would she insist upon greeting him as a friend, call him by name, and set tongues wagging and gossip guessing from one end of the county to the other, until some one somehow tripped upon the fringes of the truth and his story and hers, garbled and twisted, became common talk? That should not be; his

mind was made up on that point. If she showed the least tendency in that direction, he would leave Ostable immediately. He would invent some obvious excuse, an excuse in which her name could have no possible part, and go. To play the quitter for his own sake was a thing he would not do; for her sake—that was quite different.

But when they did meet, in the parlor of the Cash home, she was politely formal, that was all. She addressed him as Doctor Nye, and her conversation dealt entirely with the Cash baby and the baby's mother. If Manuel and the neighbors remembered her exclamation of "Ephraim!" on the occasion of the first meeting, there was nothing this time to remind them of it. In fact, her manner toward him was all that respectability, as personified by Miss Bemis or Judge Copeland, would or could have wished it to be. He stepped across the threshold of the little house, after his visit was over, with a sigh of relief. She had reflected, considered, perhaps made more inquiries and been told more "truths" concerning him, and had decided that common sense rather than sentiment should be her guide henceforward. That was what he had hoped, of course; that was perfectly right and as it should be. So he smiled, but the smile was not altogether happy.

Their next meeting was at the post office. As a usual thing, the daily mail brought little to him, but this time a medical book for which he had sent came by registered post and necessitated his signing the receipt. It was the height of the summer season and the office was crowded. He walked through the crowd, bowing occasionally in acknowledgment of greetings, the latter, however, not numerous. Behind him always were whisperings, but he was used to these—they did not trouble him.

Then, near the delivery window, he saw her standing. She was one of a group, conspicuously the center of it. The Honorable Daniel Copeland was talking with her, and there were three or four others representing the *élite*, summer or permanent, of North Ostable and Ostable Center. She was smiling and chatting gayly, and he thought, with the same sense of wonder which the sight of her always aroused, how beautiful she still was and how young she seemed. She was not young, of course, there were but a few years difference in their ages, but compared to him, as he felt, she was a girl and he an old man. Time had touched her so lightly; upon him it had leaned with all its weight.

Cyrenus Stone brushed by him. "Hello, Nye!" hailed Cyrenus. "Nice day, isn't it?"

The hail was, like most of Stone's greetings, anything but whispered, and it attracted attention. The group surrounding Mrs. Powell turned their heads. Judge Copeland turned his, saw his brother-in-law, nodded distantly, and turned away again. Most of the others did not even nod. Katherine Powell, however, looked at him, smiled, and spoke his name.

"Oh, Doctor Nye!" she exclaimed. "Good morning, I wanted to speak with you."

To his dismay he saw that she had broken away from Copeland and the rest and was approaching him. Of all things in the world, to address him in this public place, to come over, as she was coming, with extended hand, thus attracting the attention of every one there—it was worse than thoughtless, it was recklessly foolish.

But there was no escape. He could not pretend not to hear, for all in the vicinity had heard and were looking

at him. He could not run away; he could do nothing except stand there and wait, and, since she insisted upon it, accept the proffered handshake.

"I'm so glad I met you," she said, while the post office listened. "I wanted to tell you to tell Mary she must not think of coming back into service with me yet awhile. She is anxious to come and she won't pay attention to me when I tell her she mustn't. But she will mind you. She has, as we all have, complete confidence in you, Doctor Nye. I am going to Boston for a day or two, and I am leaving them all in your charge. You will look out for them, won't you? Thank you very much."

He bowed, answered, briefly and hurriedly, that he would do as she requested, and was turning away. But she would not let him go.

"Oh, one thing more," she said. "That prescription you left for the tonic. Manuel lost it, somehow or other. Can you give me a copy? If you could give it to my chauffeur now he could have it filled and take it up there at once. Would you mind coming out to the car with me?"

She did not wait to ascertain whether he minded or not, but led the way through the crowd to the door, turning to speak to him over her shoulder as he followed. At the door she waited for him and the crowd outside the post office saw them descend the steps together, she smiling and chatting and he doing his best to appear calm and at ease.

As they stood by the car together, he expressed a little of his real feelings.

"Don't you know that you shouldn't do this?" he

whispered, impatiently. "To speak to me or be seen with me are the very things you must not do. I told you so."

"Perhaps you remember that I told you you couldn't help yourself," she whispered in return. "And I really don't think this will do you harm, exactly. If I had called you Ephraim now. . . ." Then, raising her voice, she added, "Good morning, Doctor Nye. I am very much obliged to you."

He was greatly troubled, of course, by this public recognition and fearful of what she might do or say in the future. All his apprehensions returned. But the fears were groundless, apparently. When they next met, and at casual meetings thereafter, she was just as cordial, but not more so, and never in public did she, by look or word, intimate that theirs was more than mere and recent acquaintance. As for private meetings, there were none. He saw to that, and, he was obliged to admit, she did not seem to seek them. She was sorry for him and meant to help his professional standing in Ostable, so much was plain, and although he might resent her pity he could not openly object.

And she had been right when she declared that the scene at the post office would do him no harm. There were certain symptoms of its having been helpful, in a way. Prominent citizens, members of the summer colony, hitherto unconscious of his presence, now recognized him and bowed when they met. Once or twice, when Doctor Parker was away or busy, he was called to attend a sufferer in homes other than those of the least prosperous or fashionable. Respectability for the most part shunned him, but it did not make the shunning so much of a religious ceremony. He noticed this, he could not help

noticing, but it altered his own behavior not in the slightest. When sent for he went, but he never went oftener than was absolutely necessary. He returned all greetings, but he never bowed first.

Yet he would have been surprised could he have heard some of the comments and discussions of which he was the subject. For a time Doctor Ephraim Nye, his scandalous reputation and brazen effrontery had dropped to second or third place as topics of local conversation. They were superseded by Manuel Cash's drowning, the return of Mrs. Christopher Powell, and persistent rumors of some important business enterprise which Judge Copeland and a group of wealthy and prominent men were engaged in formulating. No one outside of the inner circles knew what this enterprise was, but rumor whispered that it would create a sensation when known and be of immense benefit to the township of Ostable.

But now the talk was swinging to Doctor Ephraim once more. And, as indicative of a slight but marked change, the things said were not wholly derogatory. Here and there some one ventured to intimate that the blackness of his character might possibly be streaked with gray. Even in the home of Mr. Shubal Bush such a possibility was hinted at.

It was Mrs. Bush who hinted. Her husband was no such weakling. His opinion had not varied. "I don't make up my mind right off," he was wont to declare. "I take my time, I look things over, and I weigh 'em pro and for, as the sayin' is. But when my mind *is* made up it takes some consider'ble to change it. I ain't no weathervane to drift with the tide," proclaimed Shubal.

But his wife was less stable. She had been at the post

office that day when Mrs. Powell walked to her car with Doctor Nye and she had heard things since.

"I do declare," she observed, at the supper table, the Bush clearing house for daily gossip, "I'm beginnin' to think there must be somethin' *to* that Eph Nye, after all."

Mr. Bush picked up his ears. Aunt Lindy Pepper, still a visitor at her niece's home, cupped one of hers with her hand.

"Yes, sir-ee," repeated Angelina. "There must be somethin' to that man, no matter what you say."

"*To* him!" snorted Shubal. "There's brass cheek to him, I'll give in to that much. I see him talkin' to the minister yesterday. Yes, sir, to the Baptist minister; what do you think of that! A man that stole the contribution box right out of the pulpit, as you might say, talkin' to a minister, same as if he was a Christian."

"Well, he *is* a Christian, ain't he?" demanded Aunt Lindy.

"Him! Eph Nye? Well, I should——"

"Not Nye. The minister. If he ain't a Christian, I don't know who would be."

"I wan't talkin' about the minister."

"Yes, you was, too; I heard you. You said——"

"All right, Aunt Lindy. You didn't understand. . . . I'll tell her, Shubal. . . . He said he thought it was dreadful cheeky of Doctor Nye to talk to the minister just the same as a Christian. I mean same as a Christian would talk—if he was talkin'—to a minister—and he was a Christian—Doctor Nye, I mean, not the minister. Now you understand, don't you, Aunt Lindy?"

Mr. Bush grunted. "If she does she's everlastin' smart,"

he announced. "You've mixed it up now so's I don't know as I know myself what I meant."

"Well, it doesn't make any difference, anyway. . . . Sshh! . . . What was he talkin' to the minister about, Shubal?"

"If you and—and *her,*" with a spiteful glance at Miss Pepper, "are ready to listen, I'll tell you. That's what I started to do in the first place. 'Twas down to Baker's store. I was standin' on the platform and Mrs. Chris Powell and one of them Holworthy girls that's down to the hotel, they come out of the store and the minister was with 'em. And the Holworthy girl, she says, 'What time is it?' and Mrs. Powell laughed and says she, 'It is half-past three by my watch,' she says, 'but it may be five, so far as that goes. Time doesn't mean anything to a woman's wrist watch.' And Mr. Drew, the minister, he laughed and looked at *his* watch and says he, 'Well, I declare! This is odd,' he says. 'My watch has stopped.' And then they all laughed and just then Nye come walkin' by, hurryin'—makin' believe he was busy, I suppose likely. And Mrs. Powell sang out to him, 'Oh, Doctor Nye,' she says, 'will you tell us the time, please? Mr. Drew's watch has stopped.' Nye looked at his watch and he says, 'It's ten minutes to four, Mr. Drew,' he says. And Drew says, 'Thank you, Doctor.' "

He paused. Aunt Lindy sniffed. "Well, go ahead," she ordered. "What's the rest of it?"

"Rest of it? That's all there was to it. What I'm callin' on you to notice is that 'twas Mr. Drew he spoke to, not Mrs. Powell. Wanted an excuse, that's all. He knew Mr. Drew would have to thank him and then he could go around makin' his brags that him and the minister was

on speakin' terms. Cheek, *I* say! Solid brass cheek!"

What Aunt Lindy said was, "Oh, cat's foot!" but it was sufficient to convey her opinion of Shubal's story. Angelina said more.

"I don't know," she observed doubtfully. "There must be somethin' good about Ephraim Nye when folks like Mrs. Powell and the Holworthys and the Johnsons and—and their kind are so nice and polite to him. And *I* heard —I was tellin' Althy Bemis so—that Mrs. Johnson said he cured her bronchitis when Doctor Parker only made it worse. And we all know how he pulled Faith Copeland 'round after that accident. And he fetched Cyrenus's wife through her typhoid. And the Cashes and the Dacostas and the Roses and all their tribe swear by him. His practice is growin' all the time. He may have stole and gone to jail and all that, but—but there must be somethin' to him, just the same."

Her husband pushed back his chair and rose in disgust.

"Women folks make me tired!" he declared. "Give a man a face that wouldn't stop the town clock and a slick tongue and you'll forgive him no matter what he does. Praisin' up a jailbird! Why don't you say somethin' good about the honest folks? I don't hear you goin' around braggin' about me much of any."

Angelina said nothing but Aunt Lindy said, "Humph!" and, like so many of her remarks, it was enough of its kind.

Tom Stone's calls at the Dillingham house were, if not as frequent as during the days of Faith Copeland's sojourn there, still frequent and regular. He dropped in at least twice a week. It seemed to Nye that the young man's spirits were not as high as they had been. He had devel-

oped a habit of absent-minded silences, allowing a conversation to drop in the middle and sitting without speaking for a minute or more. When reminded of the lapse he would start, laugh and explain that he was tired, had been working pretty hard and was half asleep, or that his bridge was on his mind and he couldn't shake it off, some excuse of that sort. But the Denboro bridge was, as far as Nye could learn, progressing well. It was plain to the doctor that something was troubling his young friend and he did not believe that trouble was connected with work. He imagined he might guess with what or whom it was connected, but it was not his business to guess. The nearest he came to doing so was when he dropped a hint that Tom seemed rather down in the mouth. The hint was not accepted. Stone declared that he was all right and that nothing was the matter.

But there came an evening when he not only admitted that something was the matter but told what that something was. Doctor Nye was alone when he came to the house. Henry had gone to the post office and it was an "off night" so far as Captain Mark and checkers were concerned. The doctor himself opened the door in response to Tom's knock and it needed only a glance at the visitor's face to see that the storm was ready to break.

It broke almost as soon as they reached the sitting room. Nye lit his pipe. Tom took a cigarette from his case, but, instead of lighting it, tossed it into the waste basket and turned to face his companion.

"Doctor," he blurted, "I want to talk to you."

Doctor Ephraim looked at him; then he smiled.

"Tom," he observed, "perhaps you don't know it, but that isn't an original remark. It is a quotation."

Tom was puzzled. "A quotation?" he repeated. "Oh, well, I don't care if it is. You're always quoting, so it ought to be my turn once in a while. But I'm not joking now, Doctor, this is serious."

"So was the man you quoted. You said, 'I want to talk to you.' That is a quotation from the complete works of Judge Daniel Copeland. He told me that very thing not so long ago, and in this house."

The effect of his statement was somewhat startling. Tom frowned blackly.

"Damn Judge Copeland!" he exclaimed.

The doctor shrugged.

"Very well," he agreed. "Just as you say. . . . There, there, Tom! I beg your pardon. What is it? What's wrong?"

Stone's frown was blacker than ever, but, in spite of his expressed desire to talk, he seemed to find it hard to do so. He fidgeted in his chair.

"Well, what is it?" repeated Nye.

Tom answered the other question.

"Everything is wrong," he declared. "Everything worth while. And it needn't be, either. It's just pig-headed, stubborn foolishness. . . . Look here, Doctor! I am a fairly decent respectable fellow, don't you think? As fellows of my age go, I mean."

Nye's eyes smiled this time, but his answer was gravely given. "Why—fairly so, I should say," he said. "I'm not supposed to be a connoisseur of respectability and the virtues, but I should think you might get by."

"And my business prospects aren't bad, either. You don't know about them, of course, but, honestly, they're not. I'm not likely to be rich for a good while, if ever,

but I'm doing pretty well now and, with any sort of average luck, I'll keep on doing better."

"Glad to hear it."

"Thanks. . . . I suppose you wonder why I am telling you all this. It sounds pretty cocky, I admit, but I'm not trying to show you how good I am. I'm just—well, confound it, Doctor Nye, I've been ordered off the Copeland premises as if I were a tramp, and—and I'm sore. Sore—and mad clean through."

He looked it. Nye nodded comprehendingly. His guess concerning Tom's trouble had been the correct one, evidently.

"I see," he said. "Well, Tom, I suppose it was not Faith who ordered you off."

"Faith!" indignantly. "I should say not! She isn't that kind."

"The Judge then?"

"Yes, confound him! If he were my own age I—I——"

"Of course. But if he were he would hardly be Faith's father. Tell me about it—that is, if you care to."

"That's what I came here for. I'm going to tell you the whole business. I've just got to talk to somebody about it. If I say anything at home father blows up like a mine. Why, if he knew of the little tête-à-tête Judge Copeland and I had this afternoon he would—blessed if I knew what he would do! Murder me first for going near the Copeland house maybe, and then kill the Judge for daring to tell me not to go there. Not quite as bad as that—father likes me all right—but just say 'Daniel Copeland' and his knife is out."

The doctor nodded again. "And whisper 'Cyrenus

Stone' and the Judge takes the warpath. 'A plague o' both your houses,' eh?"

"You bet! That's it! It's—what was it; Padua?—and the Montagues and Capulets all over again. . . . Humph! I'm talking too much and getting nowhere. You remember when you raked me over the coals for coming here to see Faith without the Judge's knowing it? Yes, well, I said I wouldn't come again, and I didn't. But a day or two after she was taken back to her own home I went up to call. I didn't get inside the door. The maid took my name, and the nurse—I suppose it was that Ginn woman who took Miss Dana's place—sent down word that Miss Copeland could see nobody. That was all right—then, but I tried two days later and got the same answer. And that afternoon one of the Holworthy girls told me she had seen Faith that very day and that she was almost well So I tried the day after that and got no further than the front step. *Then* I began to smell a rat."

Doctor Ephraim took his pipe from his mouth. "You have a sharp nose, Tom," he observed.

"Ye-es," sarcastically, "about as sharp as the large end of an egg. Oh, I know I was a fool not to have caught on sooner, but I didn't. And yesterday afternoon, as I was driving down past the drug store on my way home from Denboro, I saw Faith herself in the Copeland car. She was alone; the nurse, it seems, had gone into the drug store on an errand. She saw me and waved. You bet I piled out of my own car and ran over to speak with her. She didn't talk long, for that confounded Mrs. Ginn came out and interrupted, but she *did* tell me that she had been seeing callers ever since she left here and

that no one had told her of my coming. I was mad and so was she, and she told me she should expect me this afternoon. I said I would be there. Well, I was, but——"

He paused, and catching the doctor's eye, smiled ruefully.

"Some one else was there, too?" suggested Nye.

"Yes. I had got as far as that same old front step; it seems to be my high water mark. The housekeeper was telling me that Miss Faith could see nobody—the regulation yarn—and I was telling the housekeeper that she would see me because she had asked me to come. That was as far as we had progressed when the Judge came up the walk behind me."

Tom paused again. Doctor Ephraim looked interested.

"Quite a dramatic situation," he observed. "Did he ask 'To what am I indebted for this visit?' That is the regulation stage greeting, isn't it?"

"Perhaps so, but he didn't ask it. I said 'Good afternoon, Judge Copeland.' He grunted. Then I said, 'I met Faith down town yesterday and she asked me to drop in and see her to-day.' I thought I might as well hand him the plain truth, right at the beginning."

"I see. It pleased him, of course."

"Pleased him! He looked as if he would bite me. Then he said, 'You can't see her.' I said, 'But she asked me to come.' He said again, 'You can't see her.' I said, 'But, Judge, she asked me particularly——' He cut me off in the middle. 'I tell you you can *not* see her,' he said. I was beginning to boil up by this time and I said 'Why not?' Then he gave it to me straight. 'Because

this is my house,' he told me, 'and I don't care to have you in it.' "

"Humph! Well, that was frank."

"I'd say it was. It was then that I began to wish he were my own age. But *I* tried a little frankness, too. 'So far as you are concerned,' I said, 'I should never care to get in, but your daughter invited me and so I came. And I may as well tell you this, Judge Copeland, as long as she wishes to see me I shall see her. If not here, then somewhere else. Good afternoon.' He slammed the door then and I came away. . . . I think that's all."

Doctor Ephraim's smile had broadened considerably. Tom, noticing it, colored, and then added, with a short laugh which was a compound of reluctant amusement and irritation, "It does sound funny, I suppose. But it wasn't funny to me then, and I don't think the pompous old bluff himself enjoyed the joke very much. And he'll find it is serious enough, too. Does he suppose that Faith and I are going to pay any attention to *him?*" . . . He waited a moment, and then asked, impatiently, "Well? Why don't you say something, Doctor?"

His friend pushed the ash tray and the match box across the table.

"Better have a smoke, after all, hadn't you, Tom?" he suggested. "I find that smoking is a pleasant way of letting off steam."

Stone shrugged, grinned, and lighted a cigarette.

"But do say something," he begged. "Do you think I was too fresh? I—I couldn't help it, hang it all!"

"No-o, I don't know that you were. Perhaps it was just as well to have matters clearly understood. But—what do you want me to say?"

"I don't know. I had to tell some one about it and I would get no sympathy at home. Not from dad, anyhow —and mother would agree with him, of course."

"Tom—you needn't answer unless you want to—but is there anything serious, more than ordinary friendship, between you and Faith?"

Tom hesitated, looked up, then down, and then, apparently at a pattern in the wallpaper.

"No-o," he muttered, "not yet."

"Not yet. . . . I see."

"Of course I don't know how she feels—except that she likes me; I do know that. But if—if—well, neither her father nor mine, nor a million more like them are going to keep us from seeing each other. When she says she doesn't care to have anything to do with me that will end it. . . . Nothing else shall."

There was no doubt that he meant what he said. The doctor took his pipe from his mouth and rubbed it meditatively.

"My advice to you, Tom," he said, "is to wait a while."

"*Wait!* And not see her? Well, hardly."

"I didn't say that. If you and she want to see each other I imagine you will, no matter what any one else says. But wait. Don't do anything rash."

"What do you mean by rash?"

"I mean—provided you and she decide that—well, that you are made for each other and intend to marry, don't elope, don't run away, or anything like that. Except as a last resort, at any rate."

"Why should we run away?"

"Well, it is done occasionally. And very often in too much of a hurry. Wait. You can afford to, both of you.

And—it may seem presuming for a—a derelict like me to say—after all, your people and hers should be considered to some extent."

"Considered? You mean Judge Copeland should be considered? Why?"

"Because he is her father. And he—I suppose you won't believe it possible—may be almost as fond of her as you are. And you know she is fond of him. Then there are your own father and mother."

"Look here, Doctor! If she says she will marry me, and—and, by God, I mean to ask her—then nobody on earth shall make me give her up."

This fiery declaration struck sparks in an unexpected quarter. Dr. Ephraim's eyes flashed.

"Give her up!" he repeated sharply. "Did you imagine *I* would tell you to do that? That *I* would! Of course you won't give her up! Fight for her! Don't let any one—or any thing—come between you. Did you think *I* would advise you to make a wreck of your life? Why. . . . Humph!" he stopped short, drew a long breath, and leaned back in his chair. "I think that's all I can tell you, Tom," he added. "My advice is to wait and make sure and then—well, then do the straight and aboveboard thing that seems best to both of you. . . . I've talked too much; it is a disease I hoped I had recovered from."

CHAPTER XIV

RUMOR had been less busy of late with the mysterious project which Judge Copeland and his influential associates were said to be considering. When the story first came into circulation the Ostable *Enterprise* took cognizance of it as follows:

"There are whispers," said the *Enterprise,* "of a business undertaking of importance which is to be launched in our midst at a time not so very far off. Just what kind of variety this undertaking may turn out to be is not known as yet, but the story is that it will be a credit to Ostable and reflect praise upon those who with far-seeing hands are rearing its foundations. If the whispers above referred to are true, then our community will once again in the future, as so often in the past, have reason to be proud of its leading citizens."

> .."Use Bloomer's Pills for Back Ache. For sale at Kilbin's Drug Store.—*Advt.*"

The *Enterprise's* "whispers" had not, as yet, been followed by statements more resonant or authoritative. Judge Copeland, when approached concerning the truth of the rumors, merely smiled and refused to affirm or deny. Whoever the original whisperer may have been he kept silent after his first indiscretion, and local gossip having sucked that indiscretion dry, found more satisfying nutri-

ment elsewhere. Occasionally some one guessed or speculated as to what "the Judge and them" might or might not be up to, but it was a languid curiosity.

And then, on an evening late in August, Henry Ward Beecher Payson came hobbling home from mail sorting ablaze with excitement. The secret was out. The whispers were whispers no longer. The "business undertaking of importance" had ceased to hide under a bushel, but had kicked the bushel galley west and was proclaiming itself in the market place. Ostable township was to have its own water supply. A stock company had been formed to build a pumping station, lay pipes, and eventually deliver what Henry proudly called "runnin' water" in the houses and shops of the town. All hands, so Mr. Payson declared, were talking about it. Bills were posted at the office, and there were circulars for distribution at the drug store. He had laid hands upon and was proudly waving several of these circulars.

"Just think of it!" he cried. "No more wells gettin' all fouled up. No more cisterns runnin' dry. No more gasoline engines to quit pumpin' just when you need 'em most. No more—no more——" the flood of his imagination ran dry, like one of the cisterns, and he finished, rather tamely, with "No more nawthin'."

Captain Bearse and the doctor were seated at the table in the sitting room wrestling with that evening's incident in what Nye termed their "checkered careers." Mr. Payson's tumultuous entrance had, of course, interrupted the game and the pair looked and listened with interest.

"Yes, sir!" proclaimed Henry, the circulars fluttering at the end of his agitated arm. "Ostable's goin' to have its own water supply, just same as—as Boston and Brockton

and them places. Ain't that great, Doctor Eph? Ain't that wonderful, Cap'n Mark?"

The captain, who had been enjoying an unwonted run of prosperity in the checker game was not too happy over the interruption. "Huh!" he grunted. "It's wonderful enough to hear *you* hurrahin' for water. What's it all about, anyhow?"

"What are those things?" asked Nye, pointing to the circulars.

Mr. Payson presented a circular to each of the two men. He would have volunteered elaborate explanations, but his employer silenced him. Bearse and the doctor turned the printed pages.

"Humph!" snorted the former. "Dan Copeland's at the head of it. This is the big doin's the *Enterprise* has been hintin' at, of course. Pretty likely crew he's got aboard with him. Holworthy and Dayton and Adams and Lee amongst the summer folks, and Eldridge and Burgess and Cap'n Zeb Snow amongst the natives. Wonder how I came to be slighted. Why wasn't I asked to buy stock? I've got as much money as Cap'n Zeb."

Nye shook his head.

" 'Company, villainous company, hath been the spoil of me,' " he quoted. "There is your trouble, Mark. If you had shunned evil companions your name might be ornamenting the printed page with those of the elect. But the stock is all taken, apparently. As far as I have read there is no appeal for funds. What is the idea of posting the bills and getting out this prospectus?"

Henry answered the question. He was only too eager to furnish information.

"It's so's everybody in Ostable township will know

about the plan and be ready to help it along when the town meetin' time comes," he put in. "You see, they can't lay pipes along the road without act of the selectmen approved in town meetin'."

"Where is their water to come from?" asked the doctor. Captain Mark looked up from his reading.

"They've got an option on Hallett's Pond and all that chain of ponds up there in the woods," he replied. "It tells about it here in the circular. That's where 'twould have to come from, of course. Hallett's Pond is a mile and a half long and—eh? What's the matter, Eph? What are you lookin' like that for?

Doctor Nye's expression was an odd one. "Hallett's Pond?" he repeated, slowly. "Hallett's Pond!" Why, that is—I know where it is, of course."

"Course you do. You and every other Ostable boy has skated there winters and fished there summertimes."

"I've seen perch took out of that pond," began Henry Ward Beecher Payson, "as big as——"

His employer broke in. "Sshh!" he ordered. "Let me think. Hallett's Pond? Who was talking with me about that pond not so long ago? You, Mark? No, I remember; it was Tom Stone. Humph! Why should he have been talking about it?"

Bearse answered, but Nye paid little attention. He read the circular again from beginning to end, and was absent-minded and thoughtful during the remainder of the evening. The checker game was left unfinished. The captain was, by this time, like the average Ostable citizen, greatly excited over the formation of "The Ostable Power and Improvement Company" and prophesied huge public benefit from its work. He read aloud from the prospectus

and calculated and speculated much. He talked enough for two, and, when he stopped for breath, Mr. Payson seized the opportunity to talk more. Consequently the fact that Ephraim Nye said very little was practically unnoticed.

"Well, Eph," observed Captain Mark, as he rose to go, "you and I may have a sort of notion that Dan Copeland's tonnage and displacement are only about half what he thinks they are, but we'll have to own up that he's a pretty able craft, at that. This is a big thing he's doin' now . . . eh? Ain't it?"

Nye nodded. "I hope so, Mark," he said.

"You hope so! Come now, own up—you know so. Don't you?"

"I'm sure he thinks it is. And we will hope he is right."

Bearse told Mrs. Hopkins the news when he reached home. After the circular had been read and picked to pieces and applauded, he added, with a broad grin:

"Matilda, I've found out another thing to-night that's a sort of comfort to me. I've found that Eph Nye is more or less human, same as the rest of us."

"What do you mean by that?" demanded his sister.

"Well, there are times when I see him marchin' along through Ostable here, payin' no attention to the snubs and the behind-your-back talk and the lies and all, just keepin' his temper and attendin' to his business—there are times when he kind of makes me think he's too darned good to be human. That's jealousy, I presume likely, but bein' as I'm one of those sinners the hymn book tells about, the kind that has to keep up full steam to make port while

the lamp's burnin' it sort of riles me to see a man be good all the time."

Mrs. Hopkins sniffed.

"My soul and body!" she protested. "Who *are* you talkin' about? Not Ephraim Nye! I should think *his* goodness wouldn't fret you much."

Her brother chuckled. "It didn't to-night," he said. "When I praised up Dan Copeland for gettin' this water company off the ways, the best Eph would say was that he *hoped* 'twould turn out well. He, he, he! First time I ever caught him showin' a little spite like the rest of us. Good enough! He's human and I'm glad of it."

Mrs. Hopkins vowed that he ought to be ashamed of himself.

The following morning Tom Stone, looking from the window of his bedroom, was surprised to see a familiar figure descending the slope of the pasture behind the house. When he finished dressing, he hurried out in pursuit. He found Doctor Nye, his hands in his pockets, strolling along the bank of the creek in the hollow.

"Hello!" hailed Tom. "You're out early. Hunting up an appetite for breakfast?"

Nye started, turned, and seeing his friend, smiled a greeting.

"Why, yes," he admitted, "perhaps that is it. At any rate, I am sure there is an appetite in the neighborhood somewhere."

"I know where there is something to take the edge from it, too. Better come up to the house and eat with us, Doctor."

But Nye refused the invitation. He must hurry back to Henry, who was expecting him, he said.

"Tom," he added, "this creek—Stone's Creek, they used to call it when I was a boy——"

"They do yet," put in Tom. "Two-thirds of it runs through our land."

"Yes. It flows out of the cedar swamp up above here. What feeds the swamp; springs?"

"Why, I guess so. The swamp is in a hollow and it is a sort of catch basin for the water from the hills around. But it is mostly spring fed, I imagine. Why? What makes you ask?"

The doctor did not answer. He again refused his friend's invitation to breakfast and, when the young man left him, was wandering down the bank of the creek in the general direction of the Dillingham place. He had said that he must hurry, but he was not hurrying then.

On the evening of a day in the latter part of that week Doctor Parker, seated in what he scrupulously referred to as the library of his home, was very much surprised to receive a visit from a rival practitioner. The servant who answered the door bell was quite as much astonished as her master, and shared his sense of outrage.

"It's that Nye man," she announced. "He says he wants to come in."

Doctor Parker put down a copy of the *Atlantic* which he had been reading and stared at her.

"Nye?" he repeated. "Er—Ephraim Nye?"

"Yes."

"He wants to come in—*here?*"

"Yes. Says he wants to see you a minute."

"To see *me?*"

"That's what he says."

"But—but why?"

"I'm sure *I* don't know. I never heard of such a thing in my life."

Doctor Parker breathed heavily. "Well!" he exclaimed. "I must say—I must say——"

But that was all he did say, so the maid tried again.

"What'll I tell him?" she demanded.

"Why, tell him—I suppose you will have to tell him to come in. . . . But, Susan, pull down the window shades. And—and I think you had better put out the porch light."

Susan was an elderly female of a respectability in keeping with her position. She nodded. "I done that soon's I seen who 'twas," she declared, crisply.

Doctor Nye entered the library. Parker had risen and was regarding him with the expression of a Saint Peter guarding the gate—a very doubtful Saint Peter.

"Good evening," said Nye.

The saint returned the good evening. He seemed doubtful even of that.

"I won't keep you more than a minute or two," went on the caller. "I wanted to speak with you on an important matter, at least it seems important to me."

"Will you—er—sit down?"

"Thank you. Parker, I take it for granted that you know a good deal about this new water supply proposition. This Ostable Power and Improvement Company. You do, don't you?"

Doctor Parker bowed. "I am one of the stockholders," he said.

"I supposed you would be. Then you know the particulars of the whole affair, what has been done, and so on?"

"I think I may say that I do. I am—er—I have the

privilege of Judge Copeland's friendship and naturally he has discussed the matter with me. The Company is planning a great benefit to this section."

"Yes, so I gathered from the prospectus. The water is to be taken from Hallett's Pond."

"Yes. It is the largest and finest body of water within the town limits."

Doctor Nye leaned forward in his chair.

"Parker," he asked, "has that water been analyzed?"

Doctor Parker was surprised. "Analyzed?" he repeated.

"Yes. Are you—is the Company sure that that water is pure, healthful, safe to drink? The pond takes the flow from Stone's Creek, and the creek flows out of that cedar swamp back in the woods. You know that, of course?"

"Know it? Why, most assuredly I know it. What do you mean? Hallett's Pond has a reputation for its depth and the purity of its water. Its bottom is clean sand. I can't understand——"

"Wait a minute. The bottom of that creek isn't clean sand, it is mud; and the cedar swamp is bedded with black muck and peat. All that thick growth on the hills drains into it in rainy weather and when the snow melts. There are cattle pastured on those hills, and barns and shanties beyond the swamp. I should say that some of the drainage might be carried down to the pond, shouldn't you?"

Parker stiffened. "Do you imagine," he demanded, "that men like Judge Copeland and Mr. Holworthy and Mr. Lee would deliberately plan to supply this town, and their own homes, with water that was impure? It is ridiculous! The idea is absurd."

"It would be if I were thinking or saying that they were deliberately planning to do anything of the sort. I know they are not. But I am asking you if the water in that pond has been carefully tested and analyzed, that is all."

"I presume it has. . . . Of course it has."

"Then all right. That is what I wanted to make sure of. Ever since I can remember Hallett's Pond has been bragged about for its cleanliness and purity. We youngsters used to go up there for a fresh-water swim occasionally and even as boys we used to make it a point to drink a lot of what we had heard every one call the 'lovely' water."

"Well? . . . None of you was sick because of that, I suppose."

"I don't know. In those days the doctors hadn't been introduced to germs; they wouldn't have known one if they met it. If the water had killed a dozen people inside of ten years it couldn't have been convicted. Typhoid was 'slow fever' or a number of other names when you—or even I—were kids, Doctor Parker. . . . But if your people have tested that pond and *know* it is safe, I am satisfied. I was afraid you might have taken it on reputation solely."

"Indeed! I should have thought the caliber of men at the head of the Company would have been sufficient guaranty. Men like Judge Copeland and Mr. Holworthy and——"

"Yes, yes. All right. Well, that is all, Doctor. I won't trouble you any longer."

"One moment, Nye, Had you any reason other than a general and—er—I must say—to my mind most unjustifiable suspicion behind these questions of yours? As a

stockholder of the Ostable Power and Improvement Company I feel that I have the right to ask. The right to ask, sir."

Doctor Ephraim hesitated. "Well," he replied, somewhat hesitatingly, "I had this much: Mrs. Cyrenus Stone, as you know, had typhoid fever early last spring. She was under my care. You remember that?"

It was plain that Doctor Parker did remember it. Also he remembered, what his visitor had momentarily forgotten, that Mrs. Stone had been his patient before her husband, with customary rigor of action and expression, transferred her case to his disreputable competitor. His face turned a brilliant shade of purple and he rose.

"I remember that she was *said* to have typhoid after I left the case," he snapped. "She did *not* have it while she was in my charge."

Nye rose also. "Well, she certainly had it when in mine," he said cheerfully, "and the water from the old well—the water they had been using for a month or more —came from the creek we've been talking about. I may be foolishly suspicious, perhaps I am, but I wanted to make sure that the Company knew all this and had taken all precautions. Good evening, Doctor Parker."

"Here! Answer me this, sir: Did *you* have that water analyzed at the time of Mrs. Stone's illness?"

"Yes, I did."

"And did it show traces of typhoid?"

Doctor Ephraim was obliged to smile.

"Why, no, Parker," he admitted, "it didn't."

"I thought not. I thought not, sir."

"But it was full of impurities and, in my opinion, might breed almost anything at any time. . . . Don't trouble to

go to the door. I can find my way out. It is late and foggy and dark, and your maid has thoughtfully put out the light, so I can leave, as I tried to come—for your sake, Parker, of course, unseen by the neighbors.

'The night has a thousand eyes
And the day but one.'

Humph! The man that wrote that never lived in North Ostable, Parker. Good evening."

If ever an interview should, by all that was reasonable, have remained a secret this one should. Nye had taken great pains to come and go unnoticed and Doctor Parker certainly would not have mentioned it except, perhaps, to Judge Copeland, and the Judge was in Boston just then. But the fact remains that some one must have mentioned it, some one who had heard at least a part of what was said. Susan Mayo, the Parker maid, was, as has been hinted, a model of propriety. "If there's any set of folks I do despise," she often said, "it's them that stoop so low as to listen at keyholes. Keyhole listenin' is one thing I never done." So it must be assumed that she did not stoop to listen at the keyhole of the door between the Parker library and back sitting room. The Parker house is an old one, however, and its doors are thin and somewhat shrunken. A curious person *might* have heard without stooping.

At any rate, some one heard and whispered what they had heard to some one else, for, two days after Doctor Nye's call upon Doctor Parker, Cyrenus Stone knocked at the side door of the Dillingham house. Nye, alone in the dining room, called to him to come in and he did so.

He went straight to his subject, wasting no words. Cyrenus was not in the habit of wasting anything.

"Look here, Eph," he said, ignoring an invitation to be seated, "is it true that you figure that Sophrony's typhoid fever came from that creek water down in our pasture lot?"

Doctor Ephraim looked a little annoyed. He suspected what might be coming.

"I think it came from that old well of yours," he answered. "I told you so, at the time."

"I know you did. But I know you told Tom that you figured the creek water seeped through into the well."

"I think it does, to some extent."

"Um-hum. And the creek drains out of the cedar swamp and then runs into Hallett's Pond, where Dan Copeland and his gang of Republican grafters are figurin' to draw the town drinkin' water if that precious scheme of theirs is approved in town meetin'. And you know that pond water isn't safe to drink, don't you?"

"I wouldn't say that, Cyrenus."

"Well, I understand you did say it the other night. You went up to Doctor Parker's house and told him that very thing."

Nye's annoyance was evident enough now. His next speech was a crisp denial.

"I did not," he said.

"I heard you did. You went there, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"What did you tell him?"

The doctor closed the book he had been reading and laid it on the table.

"Whatever I said I said to Doctor Parker," he replied, calmly.

"Meanin' it's none of my business, I presume likely. Well, I tell you, Eph Nye, I consider the health of this town my business. Yes, and I consider it your business, too."

"If more of it were my business my business would be larger, Cyrenus."

"Oh, cut out the jokes. This ain't any joke. I know you told Parker you doubted if that Hallett Pond water was fit to drink. I *know* that."

Nye considered a moment. Then he said, "I was a little troubled, I admit. I didn't like—and I still don't like—that combination of swamp and farm buildings and creek. I asked Doctor Parker if the Company had analyzed the pond water. He said it had done so and found it pure. That answered my question."

"Huh! Maybe. And maybe they've analyzed that water and maybe they haven't. But, allowin' that they have, I can see you still feel there's a risk in usin' it. It may be pure now and not some other time? That's what you really think; now, isn't it?"

"Why—perhaps. But I may be overcautious, afraid when there is no need to be."

"You wasn't afraid to say my wife had typhoid when she had it. You didn't call it malaria or some other fancy name. I can tell how you feel. I ain't a fool. All right, that's all I want to know. You stand back of me, Eph Nye, and we'll put that pet graft of Dan Copeland's so hard and fast on the rocks he'll never get it off again. Here's our chance! If he gets that water company

through town meetin' I miss *my* guess. We'll lick him, you and I! We'll lick him good and plenty."

His eyes flashed and he shook his fist triumphantly. It was easy to see that he considered the chance to "lick" his enemy and political rival a special dispensation of Providence. The purity or impurity of the water was quite immaterial, except that it furnished the excuse for the fight.

"Stick by me," he repeated, "and we'll lick him. Here's what we've been waitin' for."

Doctor Nye slowly shook his head. "I haven't been waiting for anything of the kind," he said. "I don't want to lick him."

"*What?* You don't! Don't you want to get even? Have you forgotten the way he talked when you was——"

"Sshh! I haven't forgotten and I'm not anxious to remember. I am not against the water company or the people behind it. All I am interested in is the water itself. If it is pure—and Parker said that he found it so—that is all I care about. A town water supply would be a good thing, I believe. I am not looking for a fight and I shan't take part in any."

All this was quietly said, but with a firmness quite unmistakable. Stone stared.

"Humph!" he grunted. "Is that so! Well, all right. I'll go it alone, so far as the fight itself is concerned. But, I tell you this, Nye, I shall expect you to stick by what you said to Parker and what you've just said to me. You're afraid of that water and you've got reasons for bein' afraid of it. That's enough. That'll do. And," with a sarcastic grin, "you may find yourself so mixed up in the row that you'll have to bite and scratch whether you

want to or not. The fur will begin to fly about to-morrow. You watch it."

It flew. Cyrenus called on a Wednesday evening. By the evening of Thursday, rumors were prevalent throughout Ostable, rumors which set tongues wagging and heads shaking, not only in the homes of the Shubal Bushes and the Frankie-George Hammonds and Miss Althea Bemis, but in much more pretentious domiciles. All Ostable, high and low, had been hugely interested in the preliminary announcement of the Power and Improvement Company. Those holding its stock were envied by those less fortunate. The general opinion was that, as the Baptist minister expressed it in his "few remarks" at the supper and sale of aprons and fancy articles in the church vestry, "The flowing of that water in our streets and houses will mean the loosing of a flood of prosperity upon our community. Who could wish," he perorated, "to dam such a flood?"

It was a "lovely talk," so his hearers declared, but old Miss Pepper, who was present as the guest of her niece and nephew, heard only a part of it and her persistent quest for enlightenment brought Mr. Bush into unpleasant prominence.

"What did he say?" whispered Aunt Lindy, hoarsely.

"Talkin' about the water company," whispered Shubal, more hoarsely still.

"I know that, I should hope! I ain't *quite* a ninny. What did he say about a flood?"

"Said nobody'd want to dam it."

"Want to *what?* Talk louder."

"*Dam* it," shouted Shubal. He created a sensation and was busy explaining the rest of the evening.

But now, so rumor declared, a determined effort was on foot to dam that flood by blocking favorable action in town meeting. Another day, and it was no longer rumor, but statement of a very positive fact. Cyrenus Stone had gathered his henchmen and opened his campaign. Saturday evening saw new posters on the walls of the post office and in the windows of the billiard room. These new posters screamed war.

VOTERS OF OSTABLE! ATTENTION!

Do you intend to sign away your birthright?

The Ostable Power and Improvement Company ask you to give your highways and homes over to them for a period of fifty years. In return they will supply you with water at their own price.

Before you vote Yes at the special town meeting on the tenth of September would it not be wise to consider these things:

1. Do you wish to give up this town to ANY corporation for fifty years?
2. Do you think you, as citizens, should have NOTHING to say as to rates, etc., etc.?

3. AND IN PARTICULAR!! Are you SURE that the water to be supplied under this agreement is the sort of water our wives and children should drink? IS IT PURE? A well-known doctor has his doubts about it.

CONSIDER THESE THINGS BEFORE YOU VOTE!!

Such was the formal declaration of hostilities. Battle and skirmish followed thick and fast. The name of the Commander-in-Chief of the rebellious forces was no secret. Everybody guessed Cyrenus Stone and Cyrenus promptly confirmed the guess. He was at headquarters and his under-officers were out on the firing line. Concerning the iniquities of the fifty-year term and unregulated charges he spoke openly and fiercely. Concerning the purity of the Hallett's Pond water he was less outspoken. But he hinted, and shook his head, and looked grave and doubtful. The name of the "well-known doctor" he would not give. But he did not need to give it. Long before the day of the town meeting all Ostable township was aware that Ephraim Nye was that physician. And once again Ephraim Nye's name was the center of the local whirlpool.

They came to him, of course, demanding the truth. He would say nothing at first, but, as so much was said by others and their sayings were credited to him, he was obliged to speak. He sent a signed statement to the *Enterprise,* setting forth his reasons for suggesting that

the water be thoroughly analyzed. The editor of the *Enterprise,* a diplomatic and careful soul who had no desire to offend those in high places, managed to lose the letter. People waylaid Henry Ward Beecher Payson and questioned him. Henry knew quite as little as the questioners what the dispute was all about, but, being loyal, he stood staunchly by his employer.

"If Doctor Eph said that," roared the troubled Henry, "then, by godfreys, it's so! He knows what's what, you bet you!"

"But what did he say?" persisted the tormentor of the moment.

"How in time do I know? But it's so, whatever 'tis."

Tom Stone had enlisted on his father's side, of course. To be neutral was impossible for one in his position. He came to Nye and heard the latter's story.

"I see," he said dubiously. "Well, I shall stand by you and father, of course. But I wish dad wasn't so rambunctious about it. If any one but the Judge was president of that company he wouldn't be. They hate each other, those two. . . . And it makes it hard for Faith and me. She wrote me yesterday saying she could not understand why I should go out of my way to hunt more trouble between the families."

Doctor Ephraim looked at him. "So you correspond," he said.

Tom colored. "Why—why, yes," he admitted. "We can't see each other without a frightful row, and so— . . . . I told you I'd never give her up," he added, fiercely. "She thinks you——"

He stopped. The doctor nodded.

"She thinks I am to blame, I suppose. Well, that is natural."

"She can't understand why you should have said anything about the water unless you were sure. Doctor Parker tells every one your suspicions are ridiculous. He says you admit you could find no typhoid germs."

"That is true. And I may be over-cautious. I'm sorry—for your sake and hers, Tom."

"That's all right. I know you think you did right. But—but, confound it, it's going to make more prejudice against you, too. They say Copeland is furious. And Holworthy says you shall never come to his house again. He is vice-president of the new company. . . . Oh, Doctor Nye, I wish you hadn't!"

Another who wished the same thing was Katherine Powell. She and Doctor Ephraim met on the street. They were alone, without witnesses, and she called him by his Christian name.

"Ephraim," she said, earnestly, "do you *know* there is anything wrong with that water?"

"No.'

"Then why in the world are you fighting Mr. Holworthy and the rest?"

"I'm not fighting them. I was troubled, because I do feel that the source of that water supply is dangerous. It may be safe to-day, or next week or month, but at any time—particularly at a dry season when the creek and swamp are low, and the outlet practically stopped, the pond may be polluted."

"But it only *may* be. And Doctor Parker says it won't be."

"We-ll," Nye's lip curled, "Parker is poet laureate to

Ostable's royalty. A poet laureate's business is to sing odes, not break loose with a Marseillaise."

She shook her head sadly. "Oh, dear," she sighed, "I wish you wouldn't. I don't know that you noticed it, but you had been growing—well, more popular of late. And now . . . you make it hard for your friends."

It was the wrong speech just then. Ephraim Nye's face once more assumed the old masklike rigidity.

"The town leper," he observed, calmly, "should have no friends. Unclean! Unclean!"

He and Judge Copeland had exchanged no words since their peppery interview just preceding Faith's removal to her father's home. When they met they bowed, but nothing more. And since the opening of Cyrenus Stone's campaign of rebellion the bows had ceased. At the drug store three days after Nye's call upon Doctor Parker the former encountered his brother-in-law and Copeland cut him dead, cut him with a glare so frostily fierce that it was almost funny. Dr. Ephraim received the glare with a smile, but it was harder to smile when, later on, Holworthy and Lee—two summer residents who had for some weeks been courteous, if a trifle patronizing, did the same thing. But smile, he did, nevertheless, and his enemies, new and old, could never have learned from his demeanor that their attitude was anything but a matter of complete indifference to him.

On the ninth of September, the day before that of town meeting, another poster was displayed throughout Ostable. In large type it set forth the analysis of the water of Hallett's Pond. A prominent Boston chemist had analyzed a sample of that water and here was the result for all to read. The sample submitted had been found prac-

tically pure and absolutely safe to drink. Stone's guns were spiked. He didn't give up the fight, of course—the word surrender was not in his dictionary—but his lieutenants knew, and knew that he knew, that theirs was a lost cause.

Doctor Nye did not attend the town meeting. He was strongly tempted to go and, if anything could have been gained by it, he would have done so. But even Captain Mark Bearse, who had fought blindly for his friend ever since the latter's name was dragged into the battle, advised against it.

"You won't help any by bein' there, Eph," said Captain Mark. "I hate to say it, but if you go there you'll have to speak and there'll be all sorts of things said. If they *are* said——"

Nye interrupted. "They will be nothing new, I imagine. About everything has been said already. It isn't that which keeps me away, Mark."

"I know it; but you didn't let me finish. I was goin' to say if they were said I'd say some things myself. Yes, and I shouldn't be surprised if I did more than say. I've been ready to blow off steam for a forni't. If I got started somebody's head might get punched and I'd sleep in the lock-up to-morrow night. That would upset Matildy and wouldn't help you much. You'll have to stay at home on my account, I guess."

The doctor frowned. "I don't want them to think I am afraid," he said.

"Huh! I've heard 'em say a lot about you, first and last, but I never heard *that* said. It's a matter of policy, that's all. Why, even Cyrenus himself told me he rather hoped you wouldn't come. 'Twould hurt his side, rather

than help it, he said. And there's one more thing, Eph."

"What is it?"

The captain was embarrassed. "You see—you see, Eph, there's a question as to whether you're entitled to a vote or not. There's a law, you know, that—that a man who has been—er—er—well, who has served a—a—oh, consarn it, I guess I won't say it."

"You have said it already. A man who has served a term in prison loses his vote. That's what you mean, of course. I don't know whether that applies in a town meeting or not. But even that shouldn't keep me away if I thought I could help by going. I thought I was right when I spoke to Parker. I—yes, I believe yet that I am right. But so far as helping Stone's side or hurting it, that is a different matter."

"Yes. Yes, so 'tis. And then, Eph, there are your friends to be thought about. You've got a few friends in this town and 'twould distress them like the mischief to hear you blackguarded right to your face in that meetin'. You wouldn't care, but they would. Why, Mrs. Chris Powell spoke to me about it this mornin'. She was awfully upset. She's a good friend of yours, Eph, she told me so and she's proved it in a whole lot of ways. 'Twould make it mighty hard for her, and for me and a few more, to have all that church money business raked up and pawed over. What's the use?"

Doctor Nye was silent for a moment. Then he asked, "She—that is, Mrs. Powell doesn't wish me to go?"

"Indeed she don't. She told me to try for our sakes—for her sake, she said, but she meant all of us, of course—to keep you away."

Another short interval. Then Nye spoke.

"I won't be at the meeting," he said. "Now we'll play checkers."

At six o'clock the following afternoon the captain called again at the Dillingham place. He looked tired and thoroughly disgusted.

"Just stopped a minute to tell you the news," he said. "The Ostable Power and Improvement Company was authorized to go ahead by a vote of pretty nigh three to one. That Boston feller's water analysis settled it. It took the wind all out of Cyrenus's sails. He and some of the rest of us fought till the last plank went under, but we didn't have a show. Ah hum! All the fools ain't dead yet, and, my glory! I'm too tuckered out to start in killin' 'em just now. . . . What you doin'; gettin' your own supper? Hasn't Henry got home yet?"

The doctor shook his head. "Henry arrayed himself in purple and fine linen and started out just after dinner," he replied. "He wouldn't have missed that town meeting for anything. Didn't you see him there?"

Captain Mark looked troubled. "I caught a glimpse of him outside the hall before the meetin' began," he said. "He was togged all up in his Sunday clothes, cork leg and all. That isn't the worst of it, though. Bluey Batchelder and two or three more of that Orham gang were with him. They'd come over to see the fun, I presume likely. They was actin' pretty lively even then, but I was too busy electioneerin' to bother, though I meant to try and get Henry away from 'em later on. When I came out of the meetin' they wa'n't in sight. You ought to give that swab his clearance papers, Eph. It don't do you any good, havin' him around. . . . Well? Checkers to-night?"

"I guess not to-night, Mark. Was my name mentioned at the meeting?"

"Why,"—in spite of himself Bearse could not entirely repress a grin—"once in a while there was now and then one that mentioned it," he admitted. "Want to hear the particulars?"

"Not now. Some other time."

"Well, maybe to-morrow might be better. My safety valve may be on tighter by then. It's been blowin' off pretty reg'lar since two o'clock. Cheer up, Eph! It doesn't make much odds, this water business, after all, I shouldn't wonder."

"Perhaps not. We'll hope not. Good night, Mark."

Doctor Ephraim prepared his supper, ate it, and cleared away. Then he sat down to read. Shortly after nine a murmur of voices became audible, gradually growing louder, until it was so loud as to cause the doctor to put down his book and go to the door.

A group of three men were coming up the walk from the gate, the new gate with which Mr. Stone, as landlord, had replaced that ruined at the time of the automobile smash up. The trio walked abreast, those on the outside supporting their comrade in the middle. Their progress appeared to be strangely irregular and their behavior stranger still. The pair on the outside were singing and the individual in the center seemed to be alternately declaiming and weeping. The identity of this individual was disclosed by the lamplight from the open door. He was Henry Ward Beecher Payson.

Doctor Nye regarded the disreputable group in silence. The supporter on Mr. Payson's left spoke.

"Here he is, Doc," proclaimed this person, blithely.

"We got him home, same's said we would. Dinn't we, Bluey?"

"Darned sure!" agreed the person on the right. "Shafe-n-'sound. Come on, Bill!"

As if at an agreed signal they simultaneously let go of the Payson arms and, turning, marched toward the gate. Henry, left without support, swayed for a moment and then sank limply to the doorstep.

"Get up!" commanded Nye, sharply.

"Can't," wailed Henry. "Broke my leg."

"What?"

Startled, the doctor leaned forward.

"Yes, sir," repeated Mr. Payson. "Broke my leg. . . . No, no! Not that one. Not my—my meat leg. Thash all right. Broke my cork leg. Got it caught in—in a fence and bushted—busted it. My Sunday leg! Best leg I got, all bust to thunder! . . . Ain't it a shame, Doctor Eph! Ain't it a shame! Water bill gone through and my Sunday leg broke. Ain't it a *shame!*"

Henry lifted up his voice and wept. Nye seized him by the collar and dragged him unceremoniously into the house.

In the darkness beyond the gate Mr. Batchelder and his friend sang merrily.

Across the road a window shade was drawn shudderingly down.

CHAPTER XV

THE Bemis shudders and their cause were duly reported, of course, but the sensation aroused by Henry Ward Beecher Payson's outrageous behavior was disappointingly slight and of short life. In the first place the Payson lapse from rectitude was only what might have been expected. He had lapsed so often before. As Frankie-George Hammond put it: "What's the use of Althy's gettin' all het up on account of Henry Payson's gettin' tight. If he'd stayed sober for a year then we'd have an excuse for gettin' excited. The only thing new about this spree is that he broke his cork leg, and even that ain't worth hurrahin' over. If it had been his neck then we might hist the flag." His disgraceful homecoming was an additional black mark against the Dillingham place and its tenant, but a drop of ink on a lump of charcoal leaves no noticeable smear. Ephraim Nye did not discharge him, as a respectable person would have done, but no respectable person would ever have hired him for a household companion. Mrs. Shubal Bush summed it up when she said, "Like master, like man," and her husband added the final clincher by observing, "Yes, and a bird of a feather fouls his own nest." Doctor Nye's standing had risen a little in his native village during the latter part of that summer. But now his opposition to the Ostable Power and Improvement Company, although not depreciating its stock in the least, had dropped his own low indeed.

Henry and he were forgotten, however, very shortly. The officers and leading stockholders of the new company were men of affairs, their plans were made and ready, and, as soon as Ostable's town meeting had set its seal of approval upon the scheme, those plans were put into operation. The autumn, with its good weather—September and October on the Cape are usually the finest and clearest months—was before them, and they meant to make the most of the opportunity to get under way. Sand underlies Cape Cod's light layer of soil, and sand makes easy digging. Surveyors and engineers came, laborers were obtained, work began. Within two years, so Judge Copeland told his fellow townsmen, perhaps sooner, water would be supplied to their homes and places of business.

His prophecy was fulfilled. A mild winter followed a beautiful fall. The labor went steadily on. The *Enterprise* kept its readers posted. Its weekly bulletins were eagerly read.

> Seventeen sections of main pipe have already been laid down by the Ostable Power and Improvement Company. If this keeps on our citizens will not have as long to wait as some of them thought they would before benefiting by the public spirit of Judge Copeland and his associates in doing away with our old-fashioned pumps and wells and cisterns which are a menace and always have been to each and all of our citizens, most of whom never expected to live to see it.

Or:

> It is reported that certain persons in Ostable and North Ostable are reported to have said that they will not let the pipes of the Ostable Power and Improvement Company enter their property on any account. This is a prejudice which bites off its nose to spite its face and which time only can overcome. Have these stubborn folks never heard the proverb, "There are none so blind as those who cannot see"?

By the end of the first year it was evident that, bar accidents, the company's promise would be kept before the time limit of the Copeland forecast had been reached. And while those whom the *Enterprise* loved to classify as "our citizens" were, as a body, more interested in the promise and its fulfillment than in anything else, other happenings affecting certain individuals among them had taken place.

One of these was the death of Sophronia Stone. She died in April of that year. Pneumonia was the cause of her death and Doctor Nye fought his hardest to save her. Night and day he fought and, when the crisis came, did not leave the house, but snatched his few hours of sleep upon a couch in the room adjoining that of his patient. When she died he turned his attention to her husband. Cyrenus needed it. Hard and blunt and relentless he was to the world in general, but he had been devoted to his wife, had worshiped her in his own undemonstrative way, and her sudden taking off left him bewildered, shaken and despairing. Tom, his work at Denboro finished, had been called back to the home office of his employers at Boston, but he came down when Nye telephoned him and

remained with his father for a week after the funeral. The doctor and he had some talks together. The young man was inclined to be despondent. His mother's death was the overwhelming cause, of course, but there were other reasons for his low spirits.

He and Faith Copeland had not seen each other for months. They still corresponded but he found, or fancied that he found, a different tone in her letters. She was in California just then, visiting a school friend. Her father had been anxious concerning her health and urged her to accept the invitation. When she returned she was to go to Europe with other friends to remain there until September, at least.

"It is the Judge's doings," said Tom, rebelliously. "He knew that she and I were friends and he did not mean for her to be in my neighborhood. It isn't her health he is worried about really, it is myself."

Nye was doubtful. "I don't know, Tom," he said. "Faith is his one great interest in life. He must be mighty lonesome without her. I know he says he is, and people tell me that he looks as if he were. Do you think he would let anything except worry about her health separate them for so long a time? And that accident of hers might very likely have a lasting effect upon her nervous system."

Tom rather reluctantly admitted it.

"I suppose that is true enough," he said. "But, all the same, I think I am the main trouble."

"Does he know that she writes you?"

"Well—he knows I write her. She wrote me that he asked her and she told him. She wrote me that last November."

"Presumably she told him that she answered your let-

ters. And I think, judging by what I have seen of her, that she isn't a girl to be bullied out of what she thinks right. I don't see that you need be down about it. You are both young. There is no other trouble between you, is there?"

Tom hesitated. "No-o," he said, slowly. "No real trouble—I hope. But—well, she hasn't been *quite* the same since that confounded water company fight. You see, she asked me not to oppose the Judge and his crowd. I did try not to be too active, as you know, but I couldn't desert dad entirely. I tried to make her understand that, but—oh, hang it all, how do I know what stories they have told her!"

Doctor Ephraim laid a hand upon his knee.

"Buck up, Tom," he said. "It will be all right."

"Humph! That is easy to say. . . . Did you ever come to the conclusion that this was a rotten world?"

Nye looked at him, almost in wonder. It seemed as if the question must be ironically put. But apparently it was not; the young man was absolutely serious. Doctor Ephraim's smile was an odd one.

"Did I ever? . . . " he repeated; and added, dryly, "Why, yes, Tom; once or twice."

"Well, sometimes *I* think it is."

"You have no right to think any such thing. Compared to—— Well, for instance, what do you suppose your father is thinking at this minute?"

Tom looked aghast. "Oh, by George!" he gasped. "Why—why—oh, by George, what a beast you must think I am! I—it sounded as if I had forgotten dad altogether. And—and mother was—was——"

He choked. The doctor leaned forward. He knew

the affection that had existed between the boy and his mother.

"All right, Tom," he said, quietly. "But you must help your father all you can. He needs it."

"Yes, he does. Poor old dad! I—Doctor Nye, I hope you won't think I am entirely selfish. I have worried about—about the other matter a lot and—and——"

"Yes, Tom, of course. But I think you needn't. Faith is a fine girl. That other matter, as you call it, is going to come right, in the end."

Tom's jaw set and his eyes narrowed. "It has got to," he declared, grimly. "I'll make it."

Through that summer and the following fall and winter the life of Ephraim Nye, M. D., moved on unchanged. Each day for him was very much like that preceding it. His practice among the poorer element was larger, considerably so, but his action in criticizing the water supply had hurt him with the summer people. He was, however, earning enough to pay expenses, for his expenses were small. One extravagance, if it can be called that, he indulged in. He bought the ancient "flivver" from Captain Mark Bearse. The captain, yielding to Mrs. Hopkins' importunities, had at last decided to purchase another automobile. Selecting the make and style of this new car was a lengthy and painstaking process and Mark called his friend into consultation about every other night for a month.

"What I'd get, if I had my way," declared Bearse, "would be another open runabout. What's the use of a lot of spare seats in aft? Matildy and I, there's only two of us, and, as I tell her, why should we spend money for

extra accommodations when we don't cal'late to run a passenger craft?"

"I tell you what I'd get, if I was you," volunteered Mr. Payson, an interested listener. "I'd get one of them coops."

"Coops? What do you mean by that? I ain't talkin' about keepin' hens."

"Neither am I. I mean one of them little closed in cars, with a seat in back and another one front for the driver. Same as a what-d'ye-call-it—a sedam, only smaller."

"Sedam! Sedan, you mean?"

"Guess likely. Se—somethin'. Anyhow, them coop cars are fine. Room enough, you know, and yet there ain't so much room that somebody's always hollerin' at you to give 'em a ride. And it's got windows so's you can hist 'em up when the weather gets foul. Bluey Batchelder, he says if ever he gets a car of his own it'll be a coop and nothin' else."

Captain Mark snorted. "Bluey Batchelder!" he repeated, in disgust. "He says so, does he! Are you offerin' that as a recommendation or a danger signal? Bluey Batchelder! My glory! What *he* ought to be in ain't a coop but a cage."

But, in spite of his opinion of Mr. Batchelder and his "danger signal" the car finally chosen by the captain was a "coop"—or a coupé. And a very pretty little coupé, too. When the decision was reached Doctor Nye broached the subject which had been in his mind from the beginning.

"What are you going to do with your old car, Mark?" he asked.

"Eh? Oh, the Hyannis garage man—the one I'm buyin' the new one of—is goin' to allow me a hundred dollars

in trade. I hung out for two hundred, but he said——"

He hesitated, seemingly embarrassed.

"Well, what did he say?" asked the doctor.

"He said I'd better see one of the summer crowd instead of him; they were the ones who paid high prices for antiques."

He grinned as he said it. Nye smiled.

"I'm something of a collector, Mark," he observed. "Why don't you sell me that car? I'll give you as much as he will."

"You! . . . Why, my glory! Do you want that car, Eph? Do you mean you really want it?"

"Yes."

The captain said "My glory!" again. Then he rubbed his chin, reflected, and said "Humph!"

"Well?" inquired Nye.

"Eh? . . . . Oh, I was just thinkin', that's all."

"Thinking what?"

"I was thinkin' that, if you wasn't a friend of mine I'd *give* her to you and welcome. . . . But I want you to stay friendly, that's the trouble."

His expression was so funny that Nye indulged in one of his rare laughs.

"I'm surprised, Mark," he declared. "How many times have I heard you say that car was the finest little machine on earth?"

Captain Mark chuckled. "You don't remember old Jabez Mullett, do you?" he asked. "Guess not, he was afore your time in this part of town. Well, Jabez had a dog, sort of a brindled, yellow, pug-nosed, rat-tailed, moth-eaten critter that used to cruise in his wake wherever he went. Down to Bassett's store one day a hat drummer

asked Jabez what kind of dog the thing was. Jabez pulled at his whiskers. 'How many kinds of dogs is there altogether, do you cal'late?' he wanted to know. The drummer laughed and said he'd never counted 'em up, but there must be a hundred anyhow, he should think. Jabez wasn't satisfied. 'A hundred!' says he. 'Why, that dog there is more kinds than that.' 'Is he a valuable dog?' asked the drummer. 'That depends,' says Jabez. 'There's days when he's worth ten or eleven hundred dollars, but just now, if I could find a good home for him, I might let him go for two and a half.' All hands in the store laughed then and the drummer says, 'What days is he worth the thousand?' 'Every other twenty-ninth of February,' says Jabez. Ho, ho! I guess it must have been February twenty-ninth when I bragged about how fine that car was, Eph."

Upon one point the doctor was firm; he would not permit his friend to make him a present of the car. If he took it at all it must be at the dealer's figure, one hundred dollars. Captain Bearse argued and pleaded, but to no purpose. Finally he reluctantly agreed to the transaction at that figure, but insisted upon the doctor's taking a trial ride before paying the money.

"Nonsense!" said Doctor Ephraim. "I've ridden in that car a dozen times."

"Um-hum, I know. But it's the next one that counts. Ha, ha! That makes me think of the yarn my father used to spin about Abishai Ryder who lived over in South Denboro years ago. He wan't much account anyhow—ignorant and superstitious as they make 'em—and he had eleven children. When the twelfth was born Abishai told the doctor, he says, 'My soul, Doctor,' he says, 'I

feel safer now, I've been scared to death fear it might be twins. Thirteen's awful unlucky,' says he. Ho, ho! . . . No, Eph, you and I'll take that thirteenth ride and if we get back the same day we'll maybe close the deal."

So the thirteenth ride was taken, and, although the little car clanked and rattled and shook, as Bearse himself said, "like a tin-peddler's cart on a frozen road," nothing untoward happened and the trade was made. Thereafter the professional visits of Ephraim Nye, M. D., were, literally, noised abroad. This was a great help to Miss Bemis, enabling her to keep even more accurate "tabs" upon her neighbor, and a source of tremendous pride to Henry Ward Beecher Payson, who habitually referred to the machine as "our auto" and frequently reminded his employer that he was the one who had first advised its purchase.

Mrs. Powell and Nye met often, on the street, or sometimes at the homes of people of the poorer class who were ill. She was an active member of the Village Welfare Society and the head of its committee for charitable relief. Ostable, like most Cape villages in these days, has no almshouse, its few aged paupers being "boarded out" at the town's expense. To Doctor Nye gradually fell the care of most of these, for Parker was not well and, particularly in the winter, preferred to make no night calls. The few he did make were upon patients near at hand or in homes less draughty and unsanitary than those of the "Portygee Nest" or among the sandhills of "Lonesome Neck." He did not deliberately shirk his duties in these neighborhoods, but he was quite willing to have such duties taken over by another. The other he recommended was Doctor Hayes, of Denboro, but if the patient preferred Nye he did not

strenuously object. "As a physician," he was wont to say, "I know nothing against the man. In other respects —well, that is your affair, not mine."

Katherine enjoyed playing Lady Bountiful. Winter at Ostable was otherwise rather dull and here was something to keep her interested. She and Doctor Ephraim encountered each other in all sorts of odd places, but between them was always the wall of reserve which he never permitted to fall. He was always pleasant, but never chatty, and never, except in the case of sickness among her servants, had he visited her home. And she had never repeated her call at the Dillingham place. Once she hinted that she might do so—it was at Christmas time.

"Just to bring Santa Claus to—well, to that queer, dreadful Henry Payson of yours," she said. "You'll let me do that, won't you? I should like to hear how he says 'thank you.'"

The tone and words of his answer were uncompromisingly plain.

"If you do," he said, quietly. "I shall go away. I told you that, and I meant it."

"Ephraim!"

"I mean it. Under no circumstances must you come to my house. When you do I shall leave it—for good and all."

She looked at him. Her mood seemed oddly divided between laughter and tears.

"But it would not be to see you," she said. "Mayn't I call on Henry? I'm sure he wouldn't refuse a little remembrance. Why, I might give him a new leg."

"No."

"Very well. But. . . . Well, at least, I may wish him

—and you—a Merry Christmas, Ephraim? Wish it now, I mean."

He smiled. "You may wish it, of course," he said. "And Henry and I will say 'Thanks; the same to you and many of 'em.' That is the proper acknowledgment, isn't it?"

"I hope it is sincere."

"It is. . . . Katherine——" She started, for it was but the second time he had called her that since the old days. "Katherine," he said, "I don't want you to think I am absolutely heartless and ungrateful. I know you have been trying to help me among your friends here in town and to make life easier for me. I know that, and I am grateful for the intention. But you can't do it, and the more you try the more risk you run. Our story may become known at any time. It is what I dread. Boston isn't so far off. Your name must not now be coupled with mine in any way; I am sure you realize that. If you really want to make me happy—happier, that is—you will have nothing to do with me."

She was not laughing now.

"And this again is for my sake, of course?" she said.

"Not entirely."

"Ephraim, you are a strange man."

"So I have been told."

"You are. And a stubborn one. But——"

"Well?"

"Good-by. No, *au revoir*. And don't forget to wish Henry the 'Merry Christmas.'"

On Christmas afternoon Nye came home to find the sitting room and dining room fragrant with flowers. Henry Ward Beecher Payson was aglow with pride.

"They ain't yours, Doctor Eph," proclaimed Henry. "They're mine. That Mrs. Chris Powell she sent 'em down to me. Come out of her greenhouses, they did; her chauffeur fetched 'em. I cal'late she'd heard I liked posies and so she sent 'em. She's a nice woman, ain't she? Don't be afraid to look at 'em and smell 'em just same as if they was yours, Doc. . . . Well, they come at the right time. I was thinkin' that this was about as dull a Christmas as ever I had. My, my! I've seen Christmases that was lively enough. I remember one Christmas me and Bluey and old Squealer Wixon—he's dead now—good man he was, too—he fell into a cranberry swamp ditch goin' home one Thanksgiving night, and—well, I guess he didn't get out quick as he'd ought to. Anyhow, it gave him pneumony. Him and Bluey and me, we——"

The doctor did not wait to hear the rest.

By July of the first summer after work began the main pipes of the Ostable Power and Improvement Company were laid. By November the pumping station was ready for its machinery. In April of the second year the water was turned on. There was an imposing celebration, with speeches at the Ostable Center town hall, a parade, a band concert, and a "Grand Ball" in the evening. It had been hoped that the Governor of the state might attend and speak, but he was unable to do so, so an ex-Congressman took his place. He was eloquent indeed, and scattered bouquets with a liberal hand. Most of the flowery tributes fell in the lap of Judge Daniel Copeland. The Judge was called a benefactor, a far-seeing business man, a philanthropist, and, as Shubal Bush admiringly said, "a whole parcel of other names." When he, Copeland, rose to speak he was given an ovation. They cheered him for

minutes, so long, in fact, that Cyrenus Stone, who had so far sprawled in one of the rear settees, rose and left the hall.

The Copeland speech was widely quoted. It was a good one, not too long, nor too pretentious. The Judge stated simply that he was glad and proud to be a part—a helper—in an enterprise which, he was confident, would be of immense benefit to his native town, the community in which he had always lived and in which he meant to live until the end. The Ostable Power and Improvement Company, he believed, was destined to do more for that town than supply it with water. He foresaw the day when Ostable should have its own electric light plant, instead of being, as now, dependent upon outside sources. He thanked his friends, his fellow citizens. And to those who had opposed the Company and its plan—an opposition which, he felt confident, or at least hoped, had by this time faded into nothingness—he could only say that, so far, no workman had been devoured by the bugbears which were said to lurk behind the bushes bordering Hallett's Pond. And the fish *in* that pond were still remarkably healthy. (Loud laughter and enthusiastic cheers.)

It was a great day for Judge Daniel Copeland. If his daughter could have been present it would have been greater yet. But Faith was traveling in Europe and would not return until September. In one of the seats, however, sat Tom Stone, down from Boston for the occasion, and in another sat Ephraim Nye. When the Judge sarcastically referred to the bugbears and the health of the fish many heads turned to look at the doctor. If the owners of those heads expected to see him resentful or crestfallen they were disappointed. His own smile was almost

as broad as theirs and he seemed to be thoroughly enjoying himself. He did not attend the band concert nor the ball. Henry did, however—that is, he attended the concert and peeped in at the town-hall window at the dancing. Moreover he came home at an astonishingly early hour and in an even more astonishing state of sobriety.

Doctor Nye questioned him. The doctor was in the sitting room, reading a volume of *The Newcomes* and smoking his invariable pipe, when Mr. Payson made his entrance.

"Well, Henry," inquired the doctor, "how was the music?"

Henry grunted. "All right, I cal'late, if you like it," he replied. "I had all I wanted. I was leanin' against the stand right underneath the fellow that played the bass drum and he pretty nigh took my head off, seemed so. I stood it a spell and then I cleared out. Cap'n Mark, he see me, and he says, 'What's the matter; you ain't quittin', are you, Henry?' I told him, says I, 'What's the use of stayin' any longer?' I says. 'Nothin' but toot and bang, toot and bang, and there's too much bangin' to suit me.' That's what I told him."

"What did he say to that?"

"Oh, nothin' of any account. Said he guessed I liked a toot better—some such foolishness. Say, Doctor Eph, don't it make you sick the way folks can't mind their own business?"

"Occasionally. Why, what's the matter this time?"

"Oh, that—that Thoph Poundberry, he's constable now. Some crazy man up and nominated him last town meetin' and all he's done sence is strut around and show off. To-day was his chance. Don't talk! Great big

badge on, chest swelled up till the upper half of his vest stuck out pretty nigh as far as the lower part, and goin' around interferin' with other folks. He makes me tired. Him and them that set him on."

"Whom did he interfere with?"

Henry looked a trifle sheepish, but his indignation overcame all other feelings.

"Why—why, with Bluey Batchelder," he said. "Bluey had just got there, to the band concert, I mean, and he see me leanin' up against the stand, and sung out to me. Then that Poundberry come along and took him up. Yes, sir, took him up."

"Up where?"

"Eh? Took him up, arrested him, I mean. Said he was disturbin' the peace."

"Was he?"

"No, course he wa'n't. I told Thoph so. But it didn't do any good. All Poundberry would say was that if he wa'n't then he would be afore mornin', and that he'd had his orders from Judge Copeland. Bah! Pretty work, ain't it, arrestin' a feller to-night for disturbin' the peace to-morrow. Orders from Judge Copeland! Bah! Some folks are so everlastin' good that they drive the rest of us into bein' bad for fear we'll be like 'em. Ain't that so?"

Nye smiled.

"'Who can tell the mischief that the very virtuous do?'" he quoted.

Mr. Payson nodded emphatic approval.

"That more Shakespeare?" he demanded.

"No. That is from this book I have been reading. A man named Thackeray wrote it."

"Humph! Good for him! I bet you some puffed-up constable arrested *him* for disturbin' the peace. . . . Well, pretty disappointin' day, I call this one."

There was another dedicatory ceremony a week or so later. There had been talk in the town concerning the distribution of the water from the Hallett's Pond reservoir. It had occurred to some that, after all, those profiting by that distribution would be only the well-to-do or, at least, those who could afford to pay the Company's rates. The very poor would not benefit at all. So a few of the summer residents subscribed and erected a public fountain in the midst of the little colony in the woods. A pipe was laid connecting this fountain with the principal main, and the dwellers in the "Portygee Nest" could fill their pitchers and pails at the fountain without charge. The company gave the water and the group of citizens gave the fountain. Among this group Mrs. Christopher Powell was conspicuous.

The ceremony was a simple one. Judge Copeland spoke again, Mrs. Powell said a few words, and, on behalf of his parishioners—the members of the colony were, of course, almost all Catholics—the kindly old priest from Harniss thanked the donors for their gift. Katherine had told Ephraim Nye of her intention concerning the fountain.

"You don't still think that water dangerous to health, do you?" she asked.

"I think it at least as dangerous to those people as to others," he replied.

"But do you really consider it dangerous to any one?"

He hesitated. "As I told you before," he confessed,

"I suppose I am too fearful. I had an experience in a construction camp when I was a young chap on one of my vacations from medical school, and the trouble there came from bad water. Then in my work on the other side during the War I . . . but no doubt, as I say, I am over-particular. I don't like that creek and the swamp, and the drainage from those barns and shanties."

"But the first analysis was very satisfactory indeed. You must admit that."

"Yes."

"And the others have been just as good."

"Yes, so they say."

"I am sure they would not pretend they were if they were not. And no one but you has raised the least question."

"That's true. Nevertheless——"

He shook his head.

"Oh, nevertheless!" she repeated, a little impatiently. "How obstinate you are! That is responsible for at least half of your trouble, and it makes so much more for those who—for the rest of us. You know that men like Mr. Holworthy and Mr. Lee and Judge Copeland would not deliberately set about making people ill."

"I am sure of it."

"And they have taken every precaution. Why not admit you were wrong about that water? You don't like Judge Copeland; perhaps I don't like his pomposity—and all that, myself. But we mustn't let our personal likes and dislikes influence our judgment. I am sure he is a conscientious, upright man. And I am just as sure that you know you were mistaken about that water. Why not own up? Come now, Ephraim, be honest."

It was an earnest appeal, but not too diplomatically phrased. The imp of the perverse, who was always sitting upon the shoulder of Ehpraim Nye, M. D., took charge of the situation. The doctor's lip curled.

"Be honest?" he repeated. "I? Now, Mrs. Powell, don't you think you are asking a good deal?"

She did not answer, but turned and walked away. For a moment he hestitated, upon the point of speaking her name and asking her pardon. But the imp was still in charge and he did not do so. Yet, at home that evening, he was remorseful and miserable. His sole consolation, and it was not a satisfying one, was that perhaps it was as it should be. If he had succeeded, at last, in offending her she might not trouble herself further concerning him and that would be much the best for her. Much the best. Which was the only consideration worth considering.

All that summer the sun shone. There were a few rainy days, of course, but not enough to interfere with the peace of mind of hotel proprietors or summer sojourners. July and August were warm and fine and from the sweltering cities came the refugees in crowds. The finest weather in ten years, the *Enterprise* proclaimed it, and the most prosperous season Ostable had ever known. The new Water Company kept its laborers busy laying and connecting new pipes. Some of the Company's most obstinate opponents surrendered and availed themselves of the luxury of "running water" in their homes.

Captain Mark Bearse was one of them. "No use talkin', Eph," he said, "it's a solid comfort not to have to bother with a gas engine and a supply tank. Turn on the faucet and let her go, that's all. Solid comfort,

by glory! I wouldn't tell Dan Copeland so much for the world, but I cal'late you and I were wrong in fightin' him and his pet scheme. And nobody's sick yet from drinkin' the water. Not even Henry here. Eh, Henry?"

Henry Ward Beecher Payson snorted defiance.

"I don't drink it," he declared. "Doctor Eph and me don't take chances. The old pump's good enough for us, ain't it, Doc?"

It was good enough for Cyrenus Stone, also. Cyrenus would no more have installed that water in his house than he would have shaken hands with the president of the company supplying it. Marietta Lamb was his housekeeper nowadays and she reported him as "cranky as ever and a little more, if such a thing was possible." His son came down from Boston on week-ends to relieve by so much his father's loneliness.

The days of sunshine and drought continued. Local weather prophets shifted their wet forecasts from August to September. With the grand, crowded flourish of Labor Day the summer season ended and the visitors departed cityward. By the middle of the month only a few cottages remained open and tenanted. And still it did not rain.

Wells—the shallower among them—were drying up. The lucky majority—who depended upon the Ostable Power and Improvement Company's supply—gloated over the stubborn conservatives who were driven to "carting water" from ponds and creeks. And even the ponds were low, lower than most could remember having seen them. Hallett's Pond was large and of unusual depth, but the bushes upon its banks were yards and yards from the water line. The stream which formed its outlet had

entirely vanished. Stone's Creek itself was not much more than a trickle.

And then, one afternoon in late September, Doctor Nye returned from a call at the "Portygee Nest" with a worried look upon his face. Captain Mark drove up in grandeur upon the seat of his new "coop" to inquire concerning the possibility of checkers that evening. Nye shook his head.

"I'm afraid not, Mark," he said. "I shall be busy to-night. Vasco Rose and one of his children are sick, have been for two days now. I must go down there."

The captain nodded. "I heard some of Vasco's tribe were under the weather," he observed. "Been eatin' too much turkey and frozen puddin'?"

This last was obviously intended as a joke but the doctor did not laugh.

"No, Mark," he said, gravely.

"Sho! Nothin' serious, is it?"

"I'm not sure. I don't want you to mention it yet, but—well, it begins to look as if it might be typhoid."

CHAPTER XVI

ON an evening late in that week Doctor Parker was again surprised by a call from the person whom he would have disdained to call a rival and this time there was no attempt at concealment on the part of the latter. He came in the little car which he had purchased from Captain Mark Bearse and that car was incapable of concealment except, perhaps, in a community of the totally deaf. All of the Parker neighbors heard it roar and bang up to the curb and come to a stop there and a large majority of those neighbors saw Doctor Nye ring the Parker door bell. The visitor did not ask if the doctor was in. The window shades were but partially drawn and the library lighted, so that question would have been merely conventionally formal. Nye was not thinking of the conventionalities.

He pushed by the astonished and indignant Susan Mayo and entered the hall.

"Tell Doctor Parker I want to see him," he said.

Miss Mayo bristled. "Why—why—" she stammered, "I don't know's the doctor—I don't know as he's——"

"He is in the library. I saw him as I came up the walk. Please tell him I am here."

He gave her scarce time even for that, but entered the library uninvited and almost at her heels.

"I am sorry to disturb you in this unceremonious way, Parker," he said, "but I felt that I must see you, and I

have only a few minutes to spare. Your curtains were up and I saw that you were alone."

Parker, his Saint Peter manner very much in evidence, bowed. "I am—er—alone, as it happens," he admitted. "That is all, Susan. Pull down the curtains before you go. . . . Well, sir?"

This time he did not ask his caller to sit down. Nor did the latter offer to do so.

"Doctor Parker," he began, "perhaps you have heard that there is some sickness at the upper end of the town just now. There is, a good deal of it . . . and likely to be more, I am afraid."

Parker, who had been wondering what could have brought this man to his home a second time, now thought he could guess the reason. His manner became even more dignified.

"I am sorry to hear it," he said. "Very sorry, of course. If it were possible for me to—er—assist you professionally I should do so. But I am busy, very busy, with my own patients. I have not been well lately, and I am tired, very tired. I must not take on more work at present. I am sorry, but I am sure you will understand. Possibly Doctor Hayes——"

Nye interrupted. "We may have to call Hayes," he said. "I'm afraid we shall. As to being tired—well, I am somewhat tired, myself, but I imagine we shall both be more so rather than less."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that we are in for trouble, serious trouble. I am told that John Seaman's wife and son are sick. Is that true?"

"Why, yes. But I can't see——"

"Wait a minute. A fever, isn't it?"

"There is some temperature, of course. That is natural enough. In the first stages of influenza——"

"Are you sure it is influenza? Pardon me, I am not criticizing your diagnosis. But are you sure?"

Parker straightened in his chair. "I—well, really, sir," he began. Again Nye interrupted.

"Let me go on," he broke in. "About a week ago Vasco Rose and his daughter were taken ill with something or other, I was not certain what. Two days later one of the Dagonas was taken. Then old Peter Dagona himself came down with it. Since then there have been two more cases, Maria Gonzales and Manuel Lombard, Mary Cash's brother-in-law. All their symptoms were practically alike."

"Well? It was the grippe—the influenza, wasn't it? I understood that you pronounced it that."

"I didn't pronounce it anything. I hinted at influenza because I did not want to alarm them or others. But I was suspicious. Now the Seamans are sick, you say; and Mrs. Hammond, too, I believe. And there is a marked temperature? Backache and headache——"

"Nye, what are you hinting at? Come! What do you mean?"

"Parker, my patients—all those I have named—have typhoid. I am afraid yours have it, too."

Doctor Parker sprang from his chair.

"Do you know what you are talking about?" he demanded.

"I do. The blood test shows it in every case. And unless I am greatly mistaken there will be more of it, a whole lot more. Here is something which came to me

to-night. It is an analysis of the water which your company is supplying. Not as it was two years ago, but as it is now, after five months of drought. I took the sample myself from the public drinking fountain at Rose's house."

Parker snatched at the slip of paper. He adjusted his spectacles and read. The paper rattled in his hands.

"Good heavens above!" he exclaimed.

"Pretty bad, isn't it?"

"Bad! . . . Why—why, it is frightful! You—you took the water—you took the sample——"

"I took two. One from the drinking fountain there and one from the faucet in Captain Bearse's kitchen. They seem to be alike."

"Good heavens! Good heavens! Nye, I—I confess I have not been certain about the Seaman cases for a day or two. And—and this morning young Bassett, the storekeeper's boy, was taken with—with—— Oh, dear! Oh, dear me!"

"That water is used practically everywhere. It will spread. There is no reason why it shouldn't."

"But what shall we do? What *shall* we do?"

"One of the first things, I should say, is to prevent further use of that water just now. Hallett's Pond is so low that there is no outlet. The drainage from the barns and shanties in those hills flows into the pond and stays there. Until the outlet is deepened and the pond treated with chlorine no water should be drawn from it. At least that is my opinion. Most people have wells and cisterns. All can and must boil the water they use for drinking or cooking. We must get at it at once. You should see Judge Copeland. He is president of the Water Company."

"Yes. Yes, I will see him. I will see him now—to-night. Will you come with me?"

Doctor Ephraim hesitated. Then he shook his head. "It would do no good," he said. "In fact my being there might prejudice him and hold matters up. Show him the analysis. Tell him anything you think best. Call on me to back you if necessary. I must go now. . . . Good night."

Parker was very much shaken. He was pale and anxious.

"This is dreadful—dreadful," he stammered, nervously. "It—I shall be criticized. They will blame me. I own stock in the Water Company. I have defended its policy."

"That's all right. So has almost every one else."

"You—you—will explain my position, won't you—if necessary, I mean. You will tell them——"

"Yes, yes, I'll tell them. You go to Copeland to-night."

"I shall. At once. . . . Nye," Parker was finding it hard to say, "we—the town is—it ought to consider itself under great obligations to you. Yes—yes, it had. You discovered this. And you—it would seem that you may have been right in the beginning, right about that water. I am very glad you came to me before telling any one else. I thank you. I appreciate it. I shall——"

"There, there! Don't waste time. Parker, we are in for a devil of a mess. You and I—and Hayes also, I imagine. But don't let any one know you are frightened. You are, of course, and so am I, but we mustn't start a panic. Nurses are what we shall need. The hospital will send us all it can, but there won't be nearly enough. If you can raise volunteers among your friends, do so.

I shall try, but my supply of friends is limited. Good night."

The next day queer rumors began circulating throughout North Ostable and Ostable Center. Susan Mayo —we know her to be incapable of stooping to keyholes— nevertheless Susan's manner was excited and nervously important all that day and the excitement and nervousness spread. Judge Copeland seemed to be affected similarly, for he dashed into the Ostable telegraph office at an early hour and sent various telegrams. The operator did not divulge the wording of these telegrams, but again rumor whispered that they were sent to Mr. Holworthy, Mr. Dayton and others prominent in the ownership and management of the Ostable Power and Improvement Company. The day after that the secret was out. The community was threatened with an epidemic of typhoid fever and its water supply was the source of infection.

The weeks which followed were like a succession of nightmares to the majority of North Ostable's inhabitants. Even Althea Bemis was over-supplied with excitement. The group at sewing circle exclaimed and whispered and shuddered, and then grew too busy and too weary even to meet. There were new cases about every morning and a new death every few days. Old Peter Dagona died, so did Mrs. Hammond and the Bassett boy. At one time, the worst time, there were seventeen cases in North Ostable alone. And in Ostable Center many more.

It was curious to see how human nature reacted to the crisis. The cottages, most of them, were already closed, but others closed at once and their owners fled to their city homes. Not all, some stayed to help the overworked doctors and nurses, but the majority went—

were, in fact, asked to go by the authorities. Some of the "year-arounders" went also. Mr. Bush would have been one of these, if he had had his way, but his wife flatly refused. And, to their astonishment, Miss Pepper—who was only a visitor in Ostable and had every reasonable excuse for going—announced that she should stay.

"I ain't much good, I give in," she announced, "but I can make beds and wash dishes and I can keep awake while them that are some good get a little rest. And I can bile water, too. I never ran away from anything much in my life, and I'm too old and rheumaticky to begin."

"But you'll catch typhoid and die," yelled the exasperated Shubal. "What use'll you be dead, I want to know?"

Aunt Lindy's upper and lower set clicked together.

"About as much use as some folks around here have been and are yet," she snapped, promptly. "Everybody has their own opinion, of course, but, so far's I'm concerned, I'd rather be a total loss after my funeral than before."

Judge Copeland was one who did not run away. He stayed and fought. His standing in his native town was greatly shaken. As president and chief organizer of the Water Company, he, naturally, was blamed for the catastrophe. Things were said which no one could ever have expected to hear concerning Ostable's former idol. That idol rocked upon its pedestal. Among certain groups—the very groups which had sung his praises loudest—there were whispered threats of damage suits, even of arrest and criminal prosecution. These must have reached his ears, of course, but he paid no attention. He called public meetings and presided at them. He ordered and paid for supplies of serums and medicines. At his own expense

he brought nurses from Boston. He ordered the water from Hallett's Pond shut off, and took steps to have the pond treated chemically and its outlet deepened and cleared. He looked tired and haggard, but he did not rest. The sole precaution of a personal nature which he took was to write his daughter, Faith, not to return home, as she had planned to do, but to remain for the present with the New York friends whom she was visiting following her European trip. He wrote her that there was a good deal of sickness in town, and intimated that it was due to the contamination of the drinking water. He did not write her of the seriousness of the situation, nor of the scarcity of nurses. His greatest fear was that she might learn of this and hasten home to help.

There were others who worked unceasingly, aiding the over-driven doctors, acting as volunteer nurses, sparing nothing of effort or time or money. On the whole the town had reason to be proud of the spirit and pluck and sacrifice of its citizens, male or female, rich or poor. Among the hardest workers were Captain Mark Bearse and his sister, and Katherine Powell, and Cyrenus Stone.

Cyrenus's behavior was, it must be confessed, something of a surprise, certainly to his enemies and, in a measure, even to his friends. If ever a man had excuse for shouting "I told you so" it was Cyrenus. He did say it, of course, but even as he said it he was laboring for the common cause. He did astonishing things, like attending a meeting called and presided over by his deadly enemy, Copeland, and speaking in support of the latter's plea for funds. He subscribed, too, and so liberally that Mark

Bearse came home from that meeting in a state of bewilderment.

"Matildy," he said to his sister, "don't the Bible say somethin' about nobody's bein' able to squeeze blood out of a stone?"

Mrs. Hopkins answered absently that she guessed so, somebody said it, anyhow.

"Um-hum," observed Mark. "Well, I cal'late that statement's exaggerated. I just saw Dan Copeland get a hundred and fifty dollars out of Cyrenus Stone. After that I'd undertake to bleed Bunker Hill monument and get satisfaction. My glory!"

"What did you give?" demanded Matilda.

The captain rubbed his chin. "We-ll," he drawled, "after Cyrenus stood up and made that subscription I was in a kind of daze, as you might say. When I come to I found I'd subscribed two hundred."

"Goodness gracious! Can you afford it?"

"Eh? No, course I can't. But, generally speakin', Cyrenus thinks as much of a nickel as I do of a dollar, so accordin' to that figurin' he'd subscribed three thousand. Two hundred ain't much more 'n a postage stamp side of that."

Mrs. Powell was indefatigable. She was the leader in the work done by the women and, as usual in such emergencies, the women's work was the most important and productive of results. She and Ephraim Nye saw each other a dozen times daily, and he could not have avoided her even if he would. There was no excuse for avoiding her now. No one thought of such matters as class distinction or previous reputation, good or bad. Ostable's

black sheep was, for the time, leader of the flock and the whitest ewe lamb might trot unrebuked in his shadow.

For upon Doctor Nye fell the weightiest burden of those heavy weeks. Parker did his best, but he was a much older man and not in the best of health. Hayes, summoned from Denboro, helped too, but Nye commanded as well as served at the front. Daylight and darkness were very much alike to him then. He slept when and where he could and ate or did not eat, just as it happened. Henry Ward Beecher Payson protested and argued and pleaded.

"For thunder sakes, Doctor Eph," he wailed, "what are you tryin' to do—go on one of them hungry strikes the papers tell about? You know what they do to them hungry strikers, don't you? They give 'em watchful feedin', that's what they do to 'em."

The doctor looked up from the medicine case he was replenishing.

"Give them what, Henry?" he asked.

Henry looked doubtful. "I guess likely that ain't just the right name," he admitted. "What was it the President give them Germans time of the war? Watchful waitin', that's what 'twas. What them hungry strikers get is—er—what-d'ye-call-it—forciful feedin', that's it. If you don't eat somethin' of your own accord pretty soon I'll forcibly feed you, that's what I'll do. You listen to me now!—Sometimes seems 's if you didn't much more 'n half listen to what I say to you—you don't sleep and you don't eat and you don't rest. You don't talk. By time, I—I don't know's you even stop long enough to think. And—and, I swear if I don't believe you like it! Seems 's if you did."

His employer smiled. "Well, perhaps I do, Henry," he said. "What's the use of thinking?"

Slowly, very slowly, he and his associates began to get the better of the disease. There were fewer new cases and fewer deaths. Then, one morning, the bad news was circulated that Cyrenus Stone was smitten. He had worked unsparingly, had taken all sorts of risks, and now he was paying the penalty. He had been using water from the old well in the hollow, in spite of Doctor Ephraim's warnings, and, although Marietta Lamb, his housekeeper, was supposed to boil every drop—and declared that she had done so—doubts were expressed.

Tom Stone had been spending week-ends at home and, like every one else, had helped as volunteer nurse and doctor's assistant. Now he obtained leave of absence from his firm and came to Ostable to stay with his father. Cyrenus was a querulous, exacting invalid and Tom's position was anything but comfortable. He was anxious and apprehensive, which he had reason to be, for his father's condition was grave, and the combination of lost sleep, poor food and worry began to tell upon him, also. Doctor Ephraim was troubled and warned him to be careful, but the doctor was too busy to make sure that his warnings were heeded.

CHAPTER XVII

THE crisis in a case of typhoid is popularly supposed to be reached in about three weeks. Cyrenus safely passed that crisis, but was still a very sick man. One evening Tom came to the Dillingham place. He looked haggard and weary and he had a cough which caused Nye to frown when he heard it.

"What's the matter, Tom?" he asked. "Have you got a cold?"

Tom shook his head, impatiently. "No, no, I guess not," he answered. "I am all right—physically, anyhow. Doctor, I want to talk with you. Can you spare me a minute or two?"

Nye was eating a hasty and belated supper. "I guess I can, Tom," he replied. "Just about that. What is on your mind?"

Tom coughed, denounced the cough as a condemned nuisance, and hesitated.

"Well, Tom, what is it?" urged the doctor. "I hate to ask you to hurry, but I'm afraid I must. There are no less than nine patients on my list to be seen between now and ten o'clock."

"I understand. And I do hate to trouble you, too. But—Doctor, I saw Faith to-day."

Doctor Ephraim was surprised. "Faith?" he repeated. "Faith Copeland? You saw her? Is she here—in Ostable?"

"No, she is in Wapatomac, with a cousin. She has been there only a few days. Do you know, Doctor, she didn't learn of the dreadful muss we've been in here in Ostable until that cousin told her. Her father wrote her only a little and made light of it all. Of course his reason is obvious enough. He knew she would come home straight away and pitch in with the rest of you, and that he didn't mean to have her do. I don't blame him. Good heavens! suppose she had been here and—and caught the thing herself!"

He shivered at the thought. Nye looked at him.

"I suppose that is why you didn't write her about it," he suggested.

Tom nodded. "Of course," he said. "She gave me fits for not doing it. You see, she left New York rather suddenly, and sooner than she expected, and she phoned the Judge from Boston that she was on her way. He must have been a good deal frightened and upset, but he had the presence of mind to ask her to stop off at Wapatomac on her way down. The cousin there had been ill—grippe or something—and that furnished the excuse."

"You knew she was leaving New York?"

"No-o, I didn't. She wrote me before leaving, but I didn't get the letter. I found it, after she told me of it, tucked behind the clock at home. That brilliant 'Mary's Lamb' was responsible, of course. She is responsible for most irresponsibilities around the place."

He paused to cough. Doctor Nye scowled at the cough and asked another question.

"How did you happen to be in Wapatomac?" he inquired.

"Oh, I have been there three times within the week.

The first was last Monday. My firm were interested in another bridge-building proposition which is under consideration in that neighborhood and they wrote, asking if it would be possible for me to run over some day and get the particulars. So Monday I hired a car and drove there. Dad was so much better that I felt I could take the chance. . . . That was when I met Faith."

"Oh, I see. I misunderstood. I thought it was to-day you met her."

Tom nodded gloomily. "To-day was our third meeting," he said. "Monday was the first. I saw her coming out of the post office. I could hardly believe my eyes. She was alone, so——"

"So you thought it your duty to relieve her loneliness."

Tom did not smile. In fact there seemed to be few smiles in his system that evening.

"We had not seen each other for more than a year," he went on. "We talked a long time."

"Surprising!"

"What? . . . Oh! . . . Well, we did. She was terribly upset about the typhoid epidemic. She had phoned her father that she was coming here that very afternoon, but he had begged her to stay until the end of the week. *I* soothed her all I could, told her the trouble was practically over, that she wasn't needed, and all that. She said the Judge was coming to Wapatomac yesterday—Thursday—and she would talk with him, but she felt every one must think her a coward—and—a lot of stuff like that. That was Monday. On Wednesday I went over again and we met. We drove about in my car. I left her at the corner below her cousin's house, but—but it

seems that that cousin saw us. Somebody did, anyhow, for to-day——"

His pause was so long this time that his friend felt obliged to remind him that time was passing.

"Sorry, Tom," he suggested, "but if you *could* hurry a little. Those patients of mine——"

"Of course. I beg your pardon. You must think I am soft-headed to be telling you all this, anyhow. It isn't the sort of thing a fellow does talk about ordinarily. But you are her uncle—and you're about the only real friend I have down here just now—and—well, we have talked before, so——"

"Certainly. All true. Go on."

"Doctor Nye, when I was over there on Wednesday she and I came nearer to an understanding than we ever have before. She—she is a wonderful girl, Doctor! By George, she *is* a wonderful girl! I don't believe there ever was one like her."

Nye nodded, solemnly.

"No doubt of it," he agreed.

"What?" suspiciously. "Look here! You're not making fun of this business, are you? Because I want to tell you it is not funny to me. . . . Anything but that."

"I'm not making fun, Tom."

"Oh, I know you're not. I'm feeling rotten to-night —and behaving that way, I guess. This had been a devil of a day and I can't see any hope of to-morrow's being less devilish. When Faith met me this afternoon she looked as if she had been through purgatory. I guess she had, or what amounted to the same thing, poor girl. That cousin of hers—I hope she chokes—had seen us together on Wednesday and phoned her father. The

Judge posted over that very night. I am afraid they had a weird session."

"I see. Too bad! And yet, people say, 'wise as a judge.' 'The wise, through excess of wisdom, is made a fool.' . . . Don't mind me, Tom; I'm wandering. Go on."

"This particular judge is a fool, all right. If I had time—and you had—I should take pleasure in telling you the kinds of fool he is. I don't know just what he said to Faith, nor what she said to him. I know only what she said to me and how she looked when she said it. She told me that perhaps she *had* done wrong in corresponding with me and seeing me. After all, she was all her father had to love or to love him. He had been the best, kindest, dearest father in the world. She could see and understand his point of view. My father had treated him badly. He was prejudiced against our family, she knew that, but almost any one would be under the circumstances. And she *had* deceived him. I broke in here and said she hadn't done anything of the kind; the Judge knew we corresponded because she had told him so, herself. It didn't make any difference. I gathered that he had argued with her and pleaded—and cried, for all I know. At any rate, she had been thinking it over that night and day and had decided that we must not meet nor write for a while. Perhaps never, but certainly until her mind was quite made up what she ought to do."

"Too bad! Poor girl! Poor girl!"

"And poor me! Doctor, it's frightful. And it is impossible. It shan't be!"

"I don't think it will be, Tom, if you refuse to let it be. But you must be as patient as you can. I confess

I am a little surprised at Faith's—well, shall we call it meekness? The modern young woman is inclined to make her own decisions in matters like this, isn't she? When Faith was here, in this house, she seemed quite capable of making hers. And she had not at that time too much patience with her father's attitude."

"I know it. And I think now if he had blustered and ordered she would have told him where to get off. But he was too clever to try that. In fact she said as much. She said he told her that he would not say no to anything she really wanted—even me. But wouldn't she try not to want me, at least yet? To wait, and think it over, and —and—oh, I don't know! I guess he told her something of what he had been through this last month or two. She said he looked so thin and worn and he seemed so broken and changed; and he had kept it all from her, she said, had sacrificed himself for her. She pitied him so. He told her he was not well, almost crazy, he said. . . . If he had left out the 'almost' I should agree with him."

Nye pulled at his mustache. "Well, Tom," he said. "I think he didn't overstate his condition greatly. This epidemic coming from the water he was responsible for bringing to this town—his own town—was a tremendous shock to him. And he has worked as hard as any man among us, or any woman. It has had an effect upon his health. Parker told me he was worried about him."

Tom started to speak, went through another spasm of coughing, and then stared moodily at the fire-illumined panes in the stove door.

"I don't know that there is anything more to say," he observed. "And I don't know exactly why I came

running to you, like a kid, with this. Had to get it off my chest, I suppose. You can't help me. I've got to wait, of course, and see how it turns out. She is coming home Monday or Tuesday; she promised Copeland that she wouldn't come before then. I've got to wait. . . . But, suppose—suppose. . . . No, by George, I won't suppose anything of the kind. She belongs to me. She cares for me; she as much as told me so. No fathers, nor any one else, are going to smash our lives for us."

"I don't think they will, Tom. I'm glad you told me about it."

"See here, Doctor Nye; you—you couldn't influence her in any way, could you? She likes you; she has said so a lot of times, and she always asked about you in her letters. You couldn't—but no, of course you couldn't. I'm an awful cry-baby to-night. I feel rotten. This business, coming on top of mother's death and dad's illness, seems to have made me half sick. But I'll brace up. You go along and attend to your patients."

"I shall have to, I suppose. But, Tom, you take care of yourself. I don't like that cough. I'll give you some stuff for it and your cold now. If you feel worse to-night or to-morrow let me know at once. I'm too busy to have you on my hands just now, son."

Tom rose. "Oh, I'll be all right," he declared. "Don't you worry about me. . . . But, Doctor Nye, you think it over, won't you? There *might* be some way you could help us. Think about it."

"I'll think . . . and you think about your own health."

The next day was cold and rainy, with a chilling, penetrating wind from the sea. Doctor Ephraim was off and away at an early hour, back again at noon for a mouthful

of dinner, and then off once more. It was nearly nine that evening before he returned. Henry Ward Beecher Payson, his supper drying upon the back of the range, was not in a pleasant humor.

"Say, Doctor Eph," demanded Henry; "what you tryin' to do; see if you can live on nothin' like that other crazy doctor done one time?"

"Who was that, Henry?" asked Nye, absently.

"Eh? Tanner his name was. Guess you can't remember him, but I can; the newspapers was full of him. He set out to see how long a human critter could live without eatin' nothin' but cold water. And it rained for forty days and night. Now what good did it do him, I want to know?"

The doctor laughed. "It gave him all the cold water he needed, I should say," he observed. "Haven't you got your stories mixed, Henry?"

"Humph! Well, it don't make no difference if I have. I made cream-o'-tartar biscuit at half past five this afternoon and I've been keepin' 'em hot ever since. They're so hard now they ain't fit for nothin' but underpinnin.' I shipped to be a cook, not a mason."

"I'm sorry, Henry. I know I'm a nuisance. You'll have to try and forgive me."

"Yes, I presume likely. Well, it ought to come easy to me by now. I've had practice enough these last two months. I've been forgivin' you about every other night, seems so. You'd drive *some* men to drink, Doctor Eph, did you know it?"

"I'm sure of it, Henry."

"Yes, you would—if they was sartin they could get it after they was drove there. Oh, speakin' of drink,

Tom Stone was here about an hour ago and he looked as if somebody had been drivin' *him,* blessed if he didn't."

"What do you mean?"

"I don't know, exactly. He looked crazy, that's how he looked, and acted it, too. Crazy, or tight, or sick, or all three, or somethin'. I tried to get him to come in and wait for you, but he wouldn't. Said he'd be back bime-by. . . . But there! come on and eat your cement biscuit afore they petrify."

It was nearly half past ten when Tom did come back and his appearance and behavior went far toward justifying Mr. Payson's estimate of his condition. He was flushed, his eyes were glassy and his manner strange. He was carrying an umbrella, but apparently had not opened or raised it.

Nye looked at him in alarm.

"For heaven's sake, Tom!" he exclaimed. "What is the matter?"

Tom blinked and smiled feebly.

"Eh?" he queried. "I—I don't know, Doctor, exactly. I feel—I feel queer, sort of wobbly. Do I look so? I came here a while ago. . . .You were out."

Doctor Ephraim took him by the arm and led him into the sitting room. Then he stripped off Stone's wet overcoat and forced him into the rocking chair by the stove.

"Where have you been? What have you been doing?" he asked as he removed the coat.

Tom shook his head. "I—I don't exactly know, Doctor," he replied. "I was over at Wapatomac this noon . . . no, not to see her . . . no . . . about that bridge business. I felt queer and—and mean, then. Had a mean night, you know. . . . I didn't want any supper, and I

thought I'd—I'd come down and see you. . . . I—I'm not sure when that was. . . . Isn't it ridiculous? I—I can't remember. . . . That's funny. . . . Ha, ha!"

He began to laugh hysterically. The laugh changed to a gasp of pain. He put a hand to his chest.

"Got a—a queer sort of pain here," he muttered. "Head feels woozy. I've had a chill, too. . . . Lots of chills. . . . Ridiculous for me to be sick. . . . I can't be."

Nye turned and shouted.

"Henry!" he called. "Henry, come here! Get my bed ready. Heat some water. Get a suit of my pajamas. Hustle!"

Tom tried to protest.

"Here!" he cried. "What's all this? What are you doing? I'm not sick, I tell you. Don't you understand that? I *can't* be sick—not now."

"Yes, I know. That's why I'm putting you to bed, so you won't be."

"But I can't go to bed here. In your house. What will dad think? What—o-oh, that pain!"

Don't talk. And don't worry about your father. I'll keep him quiet. Sshh! . . . Good Lord! your feet are soaking wet! Henry, is that bed ready?"

All that night Doctor Nye remained beside the bed of this, his most recent patient. All night he worked over him and Henry Payson helped. Before midnight Tom was delirious, his temperature high, his pulse racing. In the morning the doctor turned to his helper.

"Henry," he said, "I'm going to leave him with you for a half hour or so. I must go up to his house and give some excuse for his not coming home. What that excuse will be I haven't the least idea but it must be one that

will keep his father contented for—well, for a while, at any rate. Don't leave him. I'll hurry back."

Henry regarded his employer anxiously. "Pretty bad, ain't he, Dr. Eph?" he asked, with a jerk of his hand toward the bed.

The doctor nodded. "Bad enough," he admitted, "and likely to be worse. I'm afraid of pneumonia."

Before night the fear had become a certainty. Pneumonia set in and Tom Stone was a very sick young man. Nye left him as little as possible, but there were his other patients—a long list of them—to be visited and the visiting took time. Fortunately, the typhoid epidemic was almost over. There were still a number of cases, but they were convalescent. Nevertheless, they required constant attention and careful nursing, and nurses in Ostable township were scarcer than ever. Those from the hospital at Hyannis, had, most of them, been recalled and the few from Boston were leaving as soon as they could be spared. The volunteers among the townspeople were still on duty, but the majority were worn out with fatigue and strain. Doctor Ephraim spent hours in a search for a nurse for Tom Stone, but his search was, so far, fruitless.

He came back from his round of visits to relieve the faithful Henry and take his turn at watching by his friend's bedside. He had quieted Cyrenus's anxiety temporarily by a hastily improvised tale of Tom's having been called to Boston on business. He bulldozed Marietta Lamb into a solemn promise that she would tell no one the truth. "And that *means* no one," the doctor cautioned her. "If the story of Tom's sickness gets about town, somehow or other it will get to his father, and that must not happen. How long we can keep it a secret I don't

know, but we will keep it as long as we can." Marietta vowed that not a word should pass her lips while she was awake. "And I don't hardly never talk in my sleep," she added.

When Henry Ward Beecher Payson was told of the vow he snorted incredulity.

"I wouldn't care if she was deef and dumb and swore it in sign language," he declared. "All the time she was swearin' it with her right hand she'd be tellin' it with the other. That woman's head is like one of them gasoline tanks with the faucet left open. What's poured in up at the top runs right out down below. Might as well holler a secret into the little end of a foghorn."

Of course Tom's illness could not be kept an absolute secret. Nye called Doctor Parker into consultation as soon as he saw how critical that illness was likely to be. Time was when the scrupulously virtuous Parker would have indignantly refused to obey such a summons from his tainted fellow-practitioner. He had visited the Dillingham place frequently following Faith Copeland's injury, but that was at Judge Copeland's behest. Even then he gave the impression of one who disinfects his garments after each call at the lazar house.

But the typhoid epidemic had changed all this. It had, although Nye himself realized it least of all, greatly altered the attitude of the community toward Ephraim Nye, M. D. He, so people knew and said, was the person who alone had realized the danger lurking in the water of Hallett's Pond. He had warned Parker and Copeland and their associates against that source of supply. He had led the fight against the typhoid when it came. The number of patients whose lives he had saved was greater

than either of the other two doctors. People—and respectable, church-going people, too—were saying very commendatory things of Doctor Ephraim Bassett Nye. Miss Althea Bemis did not; nor did Shubal Bush and many more. But there was a change, nevertheless; the tide might be turning ever so little in his direction, but it had turned.

Doctor Parker agreed with his associate that young Stone's condition was grave. He promised to help in obtaining a nurse.

"The only person I can think of who might be willing and able to come just now," he suggested, "is Mrs. Christopher Powell. She is at home again, you know."

Doctor Ephraim turned to look at him, looked away again, and shook his head.

Parker nodded. "I agree with you that it would be most unwise for her to do so," he admitted. "She has been a most faithful worker. She has spent days and nights in all sorts of relief work and she needs rest. I told her so, myself. She has been recently with the Snows at the Center. They are my patients. Very fine family—very fine family, indeed—er—yes. Their daughter had the typhoid and the nurse left unexpectedly. Mrs. Powell graciously volunteered to take her place—partially, that is. She is at home again now, but, as I say, she is very tired, almost worn out. Faith—Miss Copeland—told me today that——"

Nye interrupted.

"Is Faith in town?" he asked.

"Yes, Miss Copeland is here. She came back yesterday. A great relief and comfort for the Judge. He very wisely kept her in ignorance of the severity of our trouble

here and did not permit her to return until it was safe for her to do so. My advice, her remaining in New York. . . . Yes. . . . Now, as I say, Mrs. Powell *might* come here; she is quite unselfish and unsparing of her own health, but——"

"She must not come here."

"No? . . . Well, I think you are right. Of course there is no especial reason why she should."

"None whatever. Will you try the hospitals again? I have phoned them several times, but you may have more influence than I. Tell them to send a nurse—two, if possible—to-night. If not to-night, to-morrow morning. Make it as strong as you can."

"Certainly. Certainly."

"And say nothing to any one about Tom's sickness or his being here. His father is still too weak to bear the strain."

Doctor Parker pursed his lips. "It is generally known that young Stone is sick and here," he said. "I heard several persons speak of it to-day."

Nye looked annoyed. "That is too bad," he exclaimed. "Too bad! How did it get out?"

"I don't know. Keeping a secret is a difficult matter—ahem—in Ostable. I did my best to quiet all alarming rumors, of course. And I will telephone the hospitals immediately. Pray, don't hesitate to consult me again if it should be necessary. I hope it may not be. Good night—er—Nye."

All that day poor Tom tossed and muttered. It was Faith whose name he spoke continually, and Doctor Nye was, in one way, thankful that no Ostable resident save he and Henry Payson was there to hear. That evening

the doctor was summoned to a typhoid convalescent in Ostable Center. Some disquieting symptoms had developed and the family were alarmed. He rattled off in the little car, promising to return just as quickly as he could.

It was nearly nine, however, when he reëntered the house. To his surprise he found Henry in the dining room, and Henry seemed embarrassed and frightened.

"Is he worse?" demanded Doctor Ephraim, sharply.

Henry shook his head. "He ain't no better, seems so," he replied. But—but, Dr. Eph——"

"Well, what is it?

"Doctor Eph, somethin's happened—somethin'——"

"What is it? What has happened? What are you looking like that for?"

Henry swallowed. "I couldn't help her comin' in," he stammered. "She would do it. I says to her, says I, 'You mustn't come in here,' I says. ' 'Tain't right for you to. Your pa wouldn't like it and Doctor Eph, he wouldn't like it. You go right along home again,' I says. 'What do you suppose the Judge would say if he knew you was here along of him?' That's what I said to her, but it didn't make no difference. She marched right straight in, all I could do, and she's been there with him ever since. I hope you won't blame it on to me, Doctor Eph, because——"

Doctor Nye waited to hear no more. Striding to the door of the sick room he opened it quietly. Tom was, as he had left him, tossing uneasily upon the bed and muttering in the delirium of fever. Beside that bed sat a young woman who, hearing the doctor's step, turned her head in his direction.

Doctor Ephraim was not greatly surprised. Henry's

disjointed sentences had, in a measure, prepared him. But he was very much disturbed.

"Faith!" he exclaimed. "Oh, dear me! This is too bad."

Faith, if she heard, did not seem to understand.

"Oh, Uncle Eph," she cried. "He doesn't know me. He doesn't know me at all. Oh, Uncle Eph, he is *dreadfully* sick, isn't he? Oh, help me, please—*please!*"

CHAPTER XVIII

EVEN at that moment, at that crisis, Ephraim Nye, noticed that she called him "Uncle Eph." She herself was quite unconscious of having done so—he realized that—but he noticed it, and for the instant, it gave him a strange thrill. It was the first direct, open acknowledgment of relationship, of kinship, that had been paid him in more than ten years.

But he wasted no time in dwelling upon his feelings. Nor did he reply immediately to his niece's plea. He strode past her to the bed and bent over his patient. A hasty examination proved that Henry's surmise was correct; Tom was certainly no better, nor could he be much worse and continue to live many days, perhaps many hours.

He threw off his hat and coat and set to work. He and Faith must have a frank talk in which the impossibility of her remaining there should be made plain—but there was no time for it just then. He bade her call Henry and, when she did so and he came, the doctor gave crisp, brisk orders. Henry stumped to the kitchen. Then Faith laid a hand upon her uncle's arm.

"I want to help," she whispered. "I am going to help. What shall I do?"

He told her. She was white and trembling, but she understood and obeyed his orders, promptly and capably. For nearly an hour they labored without ceasing. Then Tom's breathing became more regular and his groans of pain less agonizing. At last Doctor Ephraim rose to his feet.

"He'll do for a while now," he said. "Now, Faith, I want to talk with you."

But Henry Payson put in a word.

"Just a minute, Doctor Eph," said Henry. "Cap'n Mark's out in the other room. He wants to know if there's anything he can do."

Nye considered. "Why, yes, perhaps there may be," he said. "I'll see him. Henry, you and Faith stay here."

Captain Bearse, his round face expressing acute anxiety, was seated in the dining room. He rose as his friend entered.

"I stopped in a spell ago, Eph," he explained, "and Henry told me Tom was awful sick. Can't I help any way? How is he now?"

"A little easier for the present. Yes, you can help. Help I must have from somewhere. Go out and get me a woman, some woman to come here now, to-night, and stay."

"A nurse, you mean?"

"I mean any one that is a woman—and respectable. Mark, Faith Copeland is here. . . . Sshh! Don't ask questions. You haven't time. Faith came while I was out. She heard somehow—I don't know how yet—that Tom was very sick and she came and is in there with him now."

"Faith is? Faith Copeland! My glory! Why, what's she doin'——"

"Hush! She mustn't stay here, of course. I'm going to get her home again just as soon as I can—*if* I can. But she may refuse to go at all."

"But why, Eph? Why?"

"Never mind why. Get me a capable, sensible woman —no matter if she is a hundred years old—to come here at once. And get her *quick*. Never mind what you pay. Go—and bring her back with you."

The captain was at the door. "I'll get one if I have to tow her astern of the car," he declared. "If Matilda was only on deck. But she's over to the Center with her cousin-in-law, and the cousin's awful sick, and all alone. But I'll get somebody, Eph. . . . *What* is Faith Copeland doin' along with Tom Stone, of all folks in the world? Of course the judge don't know it. What'll he say if he finds it out? . . . Aye, ay, Eph, I'm off. I'll land some female, don't you fret."

He rushed out of the house. Doctor Ephraim drew a long breath. Then he opened the bedroom door again. Faith and Henry Ward Beecher Payson were at the bedside. Faith did not turn her head, but Henry did.

"No change, Doc," whispered the latter. "He's restin' a little mite easier, seem's if he was."

The doctor nodded. "Faith," he asked, quietly, "will you come out here, please?"

She came, reluctantly. Alone with her in the sitting room, Nye motioned to a chair.

"Sit down, Faith," said he. "Yes, I want you to. Henry will call us if we are needed. . . . Now tell me about it. Why did you come here?"

She looked at him. She opened her lips to speak, but he held up his hand.

"Wait a moment," he commanded. "I'm going to prescribe for you."

He crossed to the closet and from the rear of a battery of bottles, rolls of bandage, instruments, and all sorts of

medical and surgical odds and ends, he produced a good-sized bottle half full of a dark liquid. The bottle bore a forbidding skull-and-crossbones label upon which flamed the word *poison* in crimson letters.

"Don't be frightened," he observed, smiling slightly. "I labeled this for Henry's benefit. It is some port that Doctor Hayes got for me for one of my elderly patients a year or so ago. There is a little sherry in another bottle; that is labeled 'Cleaning Fluid.' I'm sorry I haven't a proper glass."

He poured a little of the wine into a medicine tumbler and handed it to her.

"It will do you good," he said. "Drink it."

She sipped the port obediently, while he returned the wicked-looking bottle to the shelf.

"Now tell me," he ordered. "Why did you come here?"

She returned his look without wavering. "I had to come," she said. "As soon as I heard how sick he was I came."

"Who told you he was sick—and here?"

"Our maid told me first. Then I telephoned Mrs. Lamb."

"Did *she* tell you?"

"Not much, over the phone. But she told me enough to frighten me; so I drove over there in my car. She told me the truth then. . . . I made her."

"Humph! That wasn't what she told me when she swore not to mention Tom's sickness to a soul."

"Don't blame her. She had to tell. I forced it from her."

"I doubt if it required much strength. . . . But never

mind that, Faith. Of course you realize that you must not stay here."

"I shall stay. Of course I shall stay! . . . Oh, Uncle Eph, is he—is he *very* sick? . . . Oh, I am not going to give way. I won't cry; I promise you I won't. . . . But, tell me, please—*please!*"

He took her hand in his. "He is very sick—yes," he said.

"Dangerously so?"

"Yes."

"Oh!"

"Steady, Faith, steady. He is dangerously, even critically, ill, but we're not giving up the fight, by a good deal. We're going to pull him through——"

"Oh! . . . Oh, Uncle Ephraim!"

"If hard work will do it; and we must think that it will. And you, of course, must go back to your own home, go now, because——"

She interrupted.

"No," she said.

"Faith——"

"No, Uncle Eph, I shan't go. I shan't leave him now. I must stay here with him until—until he is better—or . . . Oh, of course I must! You know I must! What would you think of me if I didn't?"

"But, Faith, there is nothing you can do."

"Why not? Henry told me you had been trying everywhere for a nurse. I'm not a real nurse, of course, but I can help—I *will* help. I can do what you tell me to do and you can depend upon me, Uncle Eph. Oh, you can—you can! I *won't* give way! I won't break down! I'll—I'll—oh, *please,* Uncle Ephraim!"

She was near to breaking, even as she said it. But she fought back the tears and made a brave attempt at a smile.

"I shall work," she declared. "Oh, you will see how I can work! You won't make me leave him? . . . You know about—he has told you. He said he had."

"Yes, Faith, he has told me. But he told me, too, that your father was——"

"I can't help it! I can't help it! I love father dearly, but I know now that that doesn't matter beside—beside this. I thought perhaps it did—or should—but I know now that it doesn't. Nothing matters but Tom's life. And that may be only—only——"

"Steady, Faith. Tell me this: does your father know you are here?"

"No. No, I suppose he doesn't know where I am. I didn't tell any one. I went straight to Mr. Stone's—and then I came here."

"I see. Well, he must be told, of course. He is probably very much worried even now. . . . Why not go home and tell him just how you feel and what you mean to do? Then, to-morrow morning—or even to-night, if it were necessary—you could come back."

For a moment she hesitated. Then she shook her head. "No," she said, firmly. "My mind was made up when I came. Of course you can force me to go, but unless you do I shall stay here—with him. I will telephone father; I meant to do that, anyway. But I will not leave Tom. . . . Oh, Uncle Eph, think—*think!* He may be with me only such a little time. If I left him now I might—I might never forgive myself. Think, Uncle Ephraim! Oh, think what this means to me!"

He had been thinking, of course, and only of her. But now he looked into her eyes and they met his, unwavering and unflinching. They were no longer the eyes of the pretty, rather spoiled girl he had known. They were the eyes of a woman, a woman facing the great actualities—life, death, love. He looked into their depths—and yielded, temporarily, at least. After all, what else mattered? He took her hand once more and said, quietly:

"Very well, Faith. . . . Now I think you had better telephone your father."

The telephone was, like the second-hand automobile, a comparatively recent addition to the Nye establishment. It was in the kitchen, placed there in order that Henry Ward Beecher Payson might hear its ringing when his employer was absent. Faith rose to go to it, but just then Henry opened the bedroom door.

"Doctor Eph," whispered Henry, "he's pretty uneasy again. Don't you think you had better take a look at him?"

The doctor went to the side of the bed. Tom was tossing from side to side, muttering a name.

"Faith— Faith—" he repeated, over and over again. Nye turned to his niece, who had followed and was standing beside him. The tears were streaming down her cheeks.

"Oh, Uncle Eph!" she whispered, chokingly. "He is calling me. . . . Yes, Tom, yes. I am here—with you."

It seemed almost as if Tom heard and understood. His hand moved weakly across the counterpane.

"Faith," he whispered.

She knelt and took the hand. "Yes, Tom," she whispered.

Her uncle stroked her hair. "You shall stay, my girl," he said. "I will get word to your father."

His conversation with Daniel Copeland was brief and to the point. The Judge himself answered the phone.

"Yes, this is Judge Copeland," he said. "Who is it?"

"This is Nye speaking."

"What! Who? Nye? What Nye?"

"Ephraim Nye. I called up to tell you that Faith is here at my house."

"What? Eh? *What?* . . . Faith?"

"Yes. She is here. I think perhaps you had better come down——"

"Here! Hold on! What are you talking about? Faith is at your house? . . . Good heaven! She isn't—nothing had happened——"

"No, Judge, she is all right, perfectly all right."

"Then what in the devil is she doing at your house?"

"When you come down I will tell you. Perhaps you had better come at once."

"Here! Stop! Wait! What do you mean? What are you up to? What is this business? I insist——"

"Better come at once, Judge."

He hung up the receiver. Exactly nine minutes afterward the Copeland limousine roared up to the Dillingham gate and, one minute after that, the owner of the limousine was roaring in the Nye dining room.

"Ephraim Nye," he began, but Doctor Ephraim peremptorily silenced him.

"Stop! Be quiet!" he ordered, sharply. "Come out into the kitchen. And don't speak until you get there."

It was not precisely the tone in which the Honorable Daniel Copeland was accustomed to being addressed, but

it was a tone which startled him into obedience for the moment. His florid face grew redder still, but he followed his brother-in-law to the kitchen and stood there, mute, until Nye closed the door. Then he raised a shaking hand.

"What does this mean?" he demanded. "Where is Faith?"

"In the other room. Sit down, Judge. I'll tell you about it."

"No, I won't sit down. What is my daughter doing here—with you?"

"That's what I am going to tell you."

"I don't want you to tell me. She can tell me herself. Where is she? I want to see her."

"She is busy. You can't see her—just at this minute."

"Can't see her? *I* can't . . . What—Nye, what are you——"

"Hush! hush! Leave me out of it. I am not the important element in the situation. Faith is here, but I did not bring her here nor ask her to come. In fact, if I had my way she shouldn't have come at all. But, as it happens, she is having her own way, and neither mine—nor yours, Dan—is counting with her at all. We may not like it, but we'll have to make the best of it."

"Now what do you mean by that? . . . No, never mind. I'll find out for myself."

He was striding to the door, but Nye pushed him unceremoniously back.

"Stay where you are," he ordered, sharply. "Now—*hush!* And don't raise your voice again. There is a very sick man in there and your shouting may disturb him. This isn't a time for speeches—even yours, Judge," with a momentary return of his quiet drawl. "Tom Stone,

Cyrenus's son, is in that bedroom critically ill with pneumonia. I kept him here because his father was sick, too, and their house was no place for another invalid. Faith heard of Tom's sickness, made inquiries, and came here. She insists on staying—for a time at least. . . . Now, if you are sensible, you'll understand and make the best of it."

It was evident that Copeland did understand. The understanding was driven deeper into his brain with each one of the doctor's sharp, incisive sentences. The crimson had left his cheeks and his usually tightly shut mouth was hanging open. He understood now—but as to making the best of it, that was quite a different matter.

"She—she is in that room—with *him!*" he gasped. "Well, by the Lord——"

"Sshh! . . . Don't be foolish, man! Don't you understand yet? The boy is very sick—he may die. She knows it. Now just remember that and keep your head."

"Well! . . . Well, I—I'm sorry that he is sick, of course. But—why should she be with him? What is he to her?"

Nye shook his head impatiently. "Don't talk nonsense," he said. "You know what those two are to each other as well as I do. Yes, and you know that I know. Why pretend you don't?"

Judge Copeland did not answer this question. His teeth snapped savagely together.

"I won't have her here," he declared. "You hear me? I won't have it. . . . Why, do you suppose I am going to permit my daughter to come here to this house—*your* house, Eph Nye—to play nurse to Cyrenus Stone's son? What do you think people will say? What sort of stories

do you suppose will be spread from one end of town to the other? Haven't you any sense of decency? . . . No, you haven't," bitterly; "and no one on earth has better reason to know it than I. But I'm a decent man and she's my daughter, and I tell you she shan't stay here. . . . Good God! think of it! Alone here with three men. One of 'em the common drunkard of the town, and another——"

"Sshh! . . . Yes, Faith."

She had rapped upon the door of the kitchen and spoken his name. He bade her come in. She saw her father, but it was to Doctor Ephraim that she spoke.

"I think he is a little quieter," she said. "He seems so to me and Henry thinks the same. But won't you go and see, Uncle Eph? I'll come in a minute. I heard father's voice and I want to speak with him. I won't be long."

Nye nodded. He looked from her face to that of her parent and, in spite of the seriousness of the situation, the corner of his lip lifted. Then he hastened out, through the dining room and sitting room to the bedroom beyond. He found Tom resting more quietly. There was no real change in his condition, but for the time he was suffering less. The doctor was busy for perhaps five minutes, then Faith touched his shoulder.

"I'll stay now, Uncle Eph," she whispered. "Father wants to see you before he leaves."

It was a changed Daniel Copeland whom Ephraim Nye found seated in the kitchen rocker. When the Judge first burst into the Dillingham house he looked like one suffering from incipient apoplexy. Now he looked as if he had had a shock. He glanced up when his brother-in-law entered, but he did not speak. Nye waited a moment and then reminded him.

"Well, Dan?" he suggested. "What is it you want to say to me?"

The Judge stared miserably at a corner of the sink. Apparently he did not want to say anything.

"Faith explained matters, I suppose?" the doctor ventured.

Copeland nodded. "Nye," he faltered, "I don't know what will happen to me next. I thought these last two months had given me about all the trials and troubles one man could stand, but I see there were even worse to come. . . . I don't know what I have done to deserve them."

He groaned, in wretchedness of self pity. The doctor made no comment.

"I have tried to live an upright, Christian life. I have never knowingly committed a—er—an important sin. I have been a good father to that girl. I have! I swear I have! And now she—she leaves me like this."

"There, there, Judge! You're all wrong. She isn't leaving you."

"She is doing just that. What else do you call it? She comes here—to this house—the one place on earth where one of her family should be ashamed—should scorn to come—comes here to stay and nurse a fellow whose father has been my worst enemy. Apparently she cares nothing about what will be said. She doesn't care for her reputation or mine. She pays no attention to what I tell her. She is going to stay here with him—and you—and that Payson blackguard. All alone with you, night and day. . . . She is crazy—or worse."

"There, there, Daniel. Pull yourself together. You're tired and worn out and you don't mean what you say."

The Judge put a hand to his forehead. "Tired!" he repeated. "I'm almost dead. No one knows what I've been through since this—this typhoid epidemic came. I wasn't to blame—that is, I can't see that I was. And—and I've done my best to make it right. Now haven't I? Haven't I?"

"Yes."

"God knows I have! But they don't appreciate it. They blame me. I can see it everywhere. Oh, you can't understand my feelings, no one can. You don't know what it means to have people that used to—used to bow and scrape to you—people that have borrowed money of you—you can't understand how it feels to have your own people whispering and grinning behind your back. You can't understand it."

Nye shrugged. "It is possible that I can," he observed, shortly. His visitor did not seem to hear.

"Tired!" he repeated, once more. "I'm almost dead, I tell you. . . . Sometimes I wish I were dead."

"Yes, I know. But we can't die so easily. And you'll be back on the throne again before long. This will blow over. . . . Now, as for Faith——"

"She doesn't care, Nye. She doesn't care at all. She says she shall stay with him, no matter what is said. Alone here——"

"Wait! You are wrong. She isn't going to be alone with Tom—and Henry—and the other reprobate. I appreciate that situation and I'm doing my best to straighten it out. I am going to get some woman to stay here with her. I am trying to get one now—to-night. Mark Bearse is out hunting at this minute. He usually gets what he goes after. So far as that goes you needn't worry at all."

This should have been comforting, but apparently it was not. Again Copeland seemed to be thinking of something else.

"It is amazing," he said, slowly, "what an influence you seem to have over her. I can't understand it. Of all people—you! But—it is so."

"No, Judge. I haven't any influence over her. That's your imagination."

"I know better. . . . How long since she took to calling you 'Uncle Eph'?"

"To-night was the first time. I was as surprised as you could have been."

"Oh, don't lie. . . . I believe you are at the bottom of all this. I believe you are to blame for it. I. . . . Who is that?"

The outer door had opened and there were subdued voices in the dining room. The doctor listened.

"It is Mark," he said. "He has come back. . . . But who——"

He did not finish the sentence. There was a queer expression on his face. Stepping quickly to the dining room door he opened it.

"Mark—" he began; and again he did not finish.

Captain Bearse was in the dining room. With him was a woman. She had already thrown off her coat and was removing her hat. It was at her that Ephraim Nye was staring—and he continued to stare.

Captain Mark hailed him. "Oh, there you are, Eph!" he cried, in a triumphant whisper. "Well, I did it. I told you I'd ship a competent nurse aboard this craft afore the night was over, didn't I? And the night isn't half over yet and here she is. . . . Say, Eph, isn't that Judge Cope-

land's car out by the gate? Is he. . . . Oh! Um . . . ah . . . good evenin', Judge."

Copeland had followed his brother-in-law to the dining room. He did not acknowledge the Bearse greeting; he, too, was staring at the woman.

"Why, Mrs. Powell!" he cried, in astonishment.

She had removed her hat and was, in feminine fashion, patting her hair into place with her fingers. She turned toward him, smiling. "Good evening, Judge Copeland," she said. "Good evening, Doctor Nye."

Nye was too greatly taken aback for words. The Judge might have asked a question, probably would have asked several, but Captain Mark, bubbling over with triumph, cut in ahead of him.

"Did a good job, didn't I, Eph?" he demanded. "I was goin' over in my mind the name of every possible female woman in these latitudes that I might lay violent hands on and drag down here to stay along with Tom and—er—ahem—" glancing at the Judge—"and the rest of you. I was goin' over 'em, and I give you my word I couldn't sight a sail. And then, thinks I, I'll stop in at the drug store. Maybe Kilbin 'll know of somebody.' So into the drug store I went and I'd no sooner got there than Mrs. Powell's car hauled up alongside and in she came. I turned right to her and told her what I was lookin' for. I told her the whole business, Eph; about how sick Tom was—and who else was here, and all. 'So, you see,' says I, 'I've got to have a woman right off and the right kind of a woman, too. *Do* you know of anybody?' says I. 'My glory! I hope so.' And says she, 'Do you think I would be that kind?' I looked at her. '*You!*' I sung out. 'Why——' "

But Katherine Powell interrupted.

"Captain Bearse seemed to think I would do," she concluded, with a smile. "So it was settled. I could come perfectly well. I was only too glad to come. I went home, packed a few things and—here I am."

The captain grinned broadly. "Here she is, and a good job, too," he declared. "Ain't that so, Judge? Ain't it, Eph?"

Judge Copeland said nothing, but Nye took a step forward.

"No!" he cried, fiercely. "No, it is impossible. Mrs. Powell, you mustn't think of such a thing. It is impossible."

She was quite unruffled. "It is the most possible thing in the world," she affirmed, lightly. "In fact, nothing else *is* possible, because I am already here, you see. . . . No, Doctor Nye, you can't send me away, for I shan't go. . . . Judge Copeland, may I speak with you a moment?"

She walked to the kitchen and beckoned to Copeland to follow her. He did so. Nye walked to the north window and stood there, looking out into the blackness, his hands jammed into his pockets and a savage frown on his face. Captain Mark continued to exult.

"Best job ever I carried through, this is," he vowed. "She's just the one to be here. If Faith stays she'll have her own kind for company. You'll have the finest helper ever was. She's done more to help pull sick folks through this typhoid fever business than any other summer woman in Ostable. All hands say so. Why, she's just the one that *ought* to be here now, Eph . . . eh? What did you say?"

Doctor Nye shifted impatiently. "I said, 'Don't talk like a damned fool'," he snapped.

"What?"

"Oh, never mind! I'm sorry, Mark. You meant well, old man; I know that."

"Meant well? I did well. You know that, too. And it was just by luck I got her. Just by blind luck, and nothin' else."

Doctor Ephraim laughed shortly.

"'Dame Fortune is a fickle gipsy,
And always blind and often tipsy.'"

he quoted. "But my luck isn't blind, Mark," he added. "It can see me—and find me—whenever it is necessary."

"What *are* you talkin' about? And laughin' about, too? Don't you see how easy this will make things for you, Ephraim Nye? . . ."

"Yes. Oh, yes, Mark! I see! That's why I'm laughing."

Katherine Powell and Copeland entered from the kitchen.

"What is he saying, Captain Bearse?" she asked. The captain snorted.

"Glory!" he replied, disgusted. "More Shakespeare, that's all I can make out. You're goin' to stay, aren't you, Mrs. Powell?"

"Certainly I am. Judge Copeland is very anxious to have me. Aren't you, Judge?"

Copeland nodded gloomily.

"I shall be greatly obliged if you will," he said. "And—and I rely upon you, Mrs. Powell, to—to look out for her, in every way, and—and——"

"I shall. And you will have her bag packed and sent

right down. So that is settled. Now, Doctor Nye, what can I do to help? How shall I begin?"

Doctor Ephraim looked at her. He opened his mouth, then closed it. He shrugged a shoulder. "Oh, what's the use?" he muttered, wearily. "Come into the other room, Mrs. Powell. I will show you what to do first."

CHAPTER XIX

IN this chronicle, which is, of course, an attempt at recording the history of a portion of the life of Doctor Ephraim Bassett Nye of North Ostable, it is entirely fitting that a new chapter should begin just here. For on the evening when Faith Copeland and Katherine Powell entered, as temporary residents, the old Dillingham house, a new, extraordinary and revolutionary section of that life began. Just how different and revolutionary this section was to be Doctor Ephraim himself did not realize at first. By the time he awoke to realization it was well under way.

At first he was too busy to notice anything except the progress, or lack of it, in the condition of his various patients. There were a number of these and they kept him hard at work. Tom Stone was his greatest anxiety. For three days and nights Tom's life was fluttering, like a dandelion fluff in the breeze, between this world and the unknown. There were hours when Nye, sitting at his bedside, scarce dared look at Faith Copeland kneeling beside him, and meet the agonized question in her eyes. Yet the clock continued to tick, Tom's breath came faintly and with anguish, but he still breathed. And those about him fought on—and on.

Then there came the morning when there was a change, very slight, but still a change, for the better. He breathed easier, his fever was a trifle lower, the pain was less excruciating. Doctor Nye, himself hollow-eyed and

weary, turned to his tired helpers, and admitted that things looked a trifle brighter. After this, the improvement was slow, distressingly slow, but steady. Tom was gaining in his fight. There was a real reason for hope.

Meanwhile there had been and was excitement in the neighborhood. Althea Bemis was one of the fortunate whom the typhoid had not touched. "There's some critters too thin and tough for any kind of germ to pick a livin' off of," commented Henry Ward Beecher Payson, scornfully. No matter what the reason, Miss Bemis remained healthy and active and her interest in the affairs of her neighbors was healthy and active also. She had noticed the unusual stir at the house of Doctor Nye. She had seen Doctor Parker called in consultation. She was among the first to find out that Cyrenus Stone's son was the sufferer whose illness was the cause of the consultation. She was wide-awake and at the window when Judge Copeland came, when Mrs. Powell and Captain Mark Bearse came, and she it was who first discovered the presence of Faith Copeland. Altogether it was a blessed season for Althea. Her front window shades were wearing out, but she did not grudge the money it would cost to replace them. She bore the bulletins to sewing circle and prayer meeting and her arrival was eagerly awaited. Miss Bemis had become a personage of importance and no one realized that importance more than she did.

North Ostable, catching its breath as the typhoid epidemic waned, used that breath in discussing and speculating concerning the new scandal of Faith Copeland and Tom Stone. And Faith was Ephraim Nye's niece; that fact, almost forgotten, was now remembered, as was the deadly enmity between Copeland and Nye and Cyrenus and

Copeland. It was a gorgeous complication all around, and what it might mean or what would come of it no one knew but all could guess. Mrs. Christopher Powell's presence on the scene was explained with comparative ease. Judge Copeland had asked her to be there to look after his daughter; that was reasonable and satisfactory.

As Tom began to turn again toward life and strength, another female was brought to the Dillingham house to take up temporary abode therein. This was Mrs. Brady, the Powell cook. She came in Captain Mark's "coop" and brought a suitcase with her. Miss Bemis saw her come, saw the suitcase, drew her own conclusions and tried to prove their truth by interviewing Captain Mark as he came out again to his car.

"It's a nice mornin,' isn't it, Cap'n Bearse?" observed Miss Althea, gushingly. It was a cold, gloomy day and Althea was bundled up in a wrap and crocheted hood. The captain, bulky in ulster and mittens, regarded her grimly.

"What kind of a day?" he inquired.

"I said 'twas a nice day. . . . Course not a real nice one, not same as we have had—er—last week."

"Humph! It rained the biggest part of last week and it'll rain again in a couple of hours, or I miss my guess."

"Well . . . yes, I'm afraid that's so. But then, I suppose we'd better make the best of the time when it ain't rainin'. 'Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof'; that's what the good book says, you know, Cap'n Bearse."

"Is that a fact! Well, well! I'm glad you told me. It says somethin', too, about a word spoken in due season, don't it! Well, listen, here's the word: that woman I brought in this car is a cook. Her name is Brady and she works for Mrs. Chris Powell. Tom Stone is beginnin' to

take a little nourishment and what little he does take has got to be fixed right. That's why she's come. There's no other reason at all. She isn't going to marry Henry Payson, and she isn't Doctor Eph's wife, and she isn't Faith Copeland's half-sister on her mother's side. She's just a cook and she's comin' to get Tom's meals. . . . There! that answers your questions, don't it, Althy?"

Miss Bemis stared at him. "Why, Cap'n Bearse," she exclaimed, "what *are* you talkin' about? I haven't asked you any questions."

The captain, from the seat of his "coop" beamed upon her before closing the door.

"I know it," he agreed. "And now you haven't got to. Nothin' like that word in due season. What they call 'efficiency' these days. Great time saver, Althy. Good day."

Miss Althea gave it, as her opinion, that Captain Mark Bearse had taken to drinking or was going crazy, one or the other. Captain Mark's opinion concerning her was the same that it had always been.

Henry Ward Beecher Payson had opinions of his own bearing upon the addition of the Powell cook to the Nye establishment. Henry was insulted, his feelings were hurt. It took tact and diplomacy on the part of the doctor to soothe those feelings and reconcile Mr. Payson to the situation.

"Oh, that's all right, Doctor Eph," grumbled Henry. "I know what she's been fetched here for. I can see. I may be one-legged, but I ain't crippled in my eyesight. My cookin' ain't high-toned enough for Faith Copeland and that Mrs. Chris Powell. No fish hash and clam chowder for them two—no sir-ee! Got to have frog laigs and ros-

berry shortcake for breakfast when *they* come aboard ship. All right! A-a-all right! Only *I* shan't eat no foreign vittles. And if you take my advice you won't, neither. I've had my dose. When I was a young feller I went to sea a couple of v'yages—on a Banks schooner 'twas. One time one of them French Canada cooks had a passel of us to supper ashore somewheres up Newfoundland way. I ate and drunk my share—had to be polite, you know—but if I wasn't a sick man all next day then nobody never see one. 'Well, sir,' I says, soon's I could stop groanin' long enough to say anything, 'Well, sir,' says I, 'I've heard of French cookin' all my life, but now I know what 'tis. No more!' And I meant it, too. Course you're a doctor, Doctor Eph, and you may think you know more'n I do; but, all the same—" And so on, for five minutes at least.

Doctor Nye explained very carefully that he, personally, would much prefer the Payson brand of cookery. The Brady woman was there ostensibly to cook special dishes for Tom, but really to afford Henry a much needed rest. There was a lot of work to be done about the place which no one but the latter could perform satisfactorily. It was but a temporary arrangement, anyhow. And a half dozen additional and equally plausible excuses. Henry finally, although grudgingly, agreed to step out of the culinary department for the time being, but he asked one vital question.

"Tell me this, Doctor Eph," he demanded. "Outside of just the cookin' am I boss of the fo'castle end of this shebang?"

"Certainly."

"And she won't undertake to tell me how to make up my bed or—or comb my hair or wipe my feet—my foot, I

mean—or say I've got to wear a necktie when it ain't Fourth of July or Sunday—nothin' like that?"

"Of course not. She wouldn't presume to do anything of the sort."

"Humph! You can't never tell what them kind will resume. I lived along with a half-sister till I was eleven year old. That's one reason I ain't never married."

Of course the sudden increase in numbers of the dwellers beneath the sagging rooftree of the old Dillingham house had necessitated additions to the furnishings of that house. Tom was occupying the little spare bedroom which Faith had occupied after her accident. Doctor Nye would have given his own room to one of the volunteer nurses, but Katherine would not hear of it. There were bedrooms enough in the old house, goodness knows, she said, and all they needed were a few sticks of furniture. "Faith and I will be here only until Mr. Stone is out of danger," she added, with a hopeful smile, "and I'm sure neither of us is a bit fussy." So, without consulting the doctor, she had the "few sticks" of furniture brought from her own house and set up in a spare bedroom. That room was, of course, colder than Greenland, but an oil heater helped to raise the temperature. It was camping out for the two women; also for Henry, who, under protest, gave up his room to Mrs. Brady and slept on a cot in the washroom back of the kitchen.

With the establishment of the new cook, and the definite move toward recovery of Tom Stone, began the change, already alluded to, in the daily life of Ephraim Nye, M.D. The change came slowly. An atmosphere of tidiness began to pervade the household. The doctor's bed was made, not tumbled together. Meals were served and

cooked daintily. The table cloth no longer resembled a map of a South Sea archipelago. It was changed, when soiled, for a clean one. The patterns of the rugs became again visible. And, as the doctor began to find, once more, a little time to spend at home, he awoke to the realization that it was a home—not a mere shelter from the weather. It was a strange experience for him, who had spent his later years in quarters ranging from a prison cell and a French dugout to the dusty, dingy rooms of the Dillingham house as it was under Payson's charge. It might have been a distinctly pleasant experience had not the impossibility of it continually forced itself upon his attention.

There were so many impossibilities connected with it. His niece's presence again beneath his roof was bad enough. Faith's accident had happened at his very door, had brought her and her father inside that door. When that was over, and the door had been shut after their departure, Katherine Powell—always Katherine Minot to him—had come to Ostable, to tear open the old wound and make his hard life harder. No one but he knew how close he had been to moving away that night following their meeting at the home of Manuel Cash. But he had stayed on, had avoided her as much as possible, and had found a degree of forgetfulness in his work. The typhoid epidemic had, in a grim sort of way, been a help to him. While that lasted he had time to think of little else.

But now came this new complication, bringing Faith again to his dwelling and bringing, too—in a degree of intimate relationship which was sweet and bitter and joyous and cruel—the woman he had loved—yes, and would love until he died. Bringing her here to be with him in

the everyday intimacy of a home. To sit opposite him at table, to ask his advice about this or that, to chat with him, and laugh with him, and plan with him, just as he had dreamed of her doing—as they had dreamed together—in those other days. Ephraim Nye was as free from superstition as any man in the world, but there were times when he found it hard to believe all this mere coincidence. It was easier, as he had once jokingly said to Doctor Parker, to believe in the malignant spite of a personal devil.

Well, devil or coincidence, it could not be borne. It should not be. And, more than all, it must end soon—for his sake very soon.

He hinted at the end one morning when he and Katherine were at table. Faith was with Tom, superintending his breakfasting, a ceremony which, now that he was permitted to eat a little, she invariably performed. It was a sunshiny winter day and the shabby dining room looked almost cheerful. Katherine, presiding at the coffee pot, was cheerful also, and an unprejudiced male would have found her extremely pleasant to look at. Ephraim Nye cast the only gloomy shadow in the room. He had had a bad night, thinking much and sleeping little.

"You look very tired this morning, Ephraim," observed Katherine, who had been watching him. He glanced at her quickly, then in the direction of the kitchen.

"Careful!" he cautioned, rather sharply.

She laughed. "Oh, Margaret can't hear," she declared. "She is making too much noise with the dishes."

"You shouldn't take the risk. No one must hear you call me that. You know it. There is too much talk already. This house is watched like a rathole."

"By Miss Bemis, I suppose?"

"By her—and forty others. They are talking of Faith and Tom just now, which is fortunate for the rest of us; but I am continually afraid that they may pick up a word which will put them on the track of the fact that you and I used to know each other. Once let them get a hint of that and—well, heaven knows what may be said, or what stories told."

She seemed to find the idea amusing. "I am sure they would be interesting—those stories," she observed, with a smile.

"Interesting! . . . Yes, they would be at least that. And they must not be told. You must leave this house and go back to your own home. It is no use my saying you should never have come here. I have said that times enough already."

"You have. Too many times, I think. Your anxiety to get rid of me isn't very complimentary. I am having a rather pleasant visit, Ephraim. I am sorry I make my host so miserable. Come now; isn't this a better breakfast than Henry Payson used to provide?"

He shrugged. Words were unnecessary.

"I am sure it is," she affirmed. "And it seems to me that this room is—well, a bit less grimy than it used to be. And *I* am enjoying these little talks of ours. Truly now, Ephraim, aren't you?"

He looked at her and his expression caused her own to change. She leaned toward him.

"I am sorry," she said, quickly. "Forgive me, please. I don't know why I am so frivolous this morning. Perhaps because Tom is so much better and Faith so enraptured in consequence. He is out of danger, isn't he?"

He hesitated. Then he nodded. "I think he is," he said, deliberately. "Yes, at least I believe we may say that he is."

"And you pulled him through. His is another name to add to your scroll of triumph. Do you know what they are beginning to call you around town, so Margaret Brady says?"

He smiled. "I know a few of the things they have called me from time to time in the past," he observed.

"They are calling you now, some of them, so Margaret says, 'the miracle man.' That was the name of a play a few years ago. Its hero saved people's lives, just as you have been doing."

He was disgusted. " 'The miracle man!' " he repeated, bitterly. "Humph! . . . Well, now that I have admitted that Tom is out of danger, don't you think you had better go back to your own home?"

"Do you want me to go so very much, Ephraim?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Oh, *don't!* . . . You know why."

"But I can't leave Faith. I promised her father that I would stay as long as she did."

"Faith must go, too. I think I can get a nurse now. Parker says the Boston people write they believe they can send a good one, at last."

"But Faith won't leave Tom yet. And you told me yourself, only a day or two ago, that you thought her presence was doing more than anything else to bring him back to health."

"Yes, I know it. . . . But she shouldn't be here, in this house, with me. Ask Judge Copeland if he doesn't agree

to that. By the way, why was she so depressed after the Judge left yesterday? She looked to me as if she had been crying."

"I think she had. Ephraim, I am worried about that. Her father is tormenting her again; I am sure of it."

"Tormenting her? What do you mean?"

"I mean—Ephraim, I am very fond of Faith Copeland. I liked her when I first met her; I have always liked her. But since I came here and have been with her day after day, I have grown very fond of her. When we all thought Tom was dying she did not weaken, she was as brave as the bravest, she has worked night and day, she is as sensible as she is attractive and pretty. I used to fear she might be shallow and spoiled. She isn't. She has a fine character. Don't you think so?"

"Yes."

"And, Ephraim, their love—those two young people—is the real thing. It is."

He did not comment upon the statement. "What do you mean by her father tormenting her?" he asked.

"I mean that he is continually trying to influence her against Tom Stone."

"Pshaw! He can't do it."

"Not in one way—no. But in another I am afraid he may. She is devoted to her father and he does worship her. But it is a selfish worship. He is not well, he looks worn and tired and he is continually telling her that he is sick and thinks he is going to die. Intimates that he doesn't care greatly, is discouraged—all that sort of thing. Doctor Parker tells him he must go away and rest, but he won't go. Faith could go with him—yes, but not alone. If he is going to die he wants to die near her, where she

can be with him at the last. He tells Faith this every time he comes here, or so I infer from what she has said. And Faith loves and pities him; she is sensitive and conscientious."

She paused. Nye frowned.

"I see," he said. "Yes, I see."

"I am afraid that, in the end, she may feel it is her duty to go away with him—go wherever Doctor Parker suggests sending them. They may stay for a long time. She will be under his influence. Such separations and influences are always dangerous. . . . Oh, yes, I know it!"

He did not answer.

"Ephraim," she went on, "I can't bear to think of these two young lives being spoiled because of the selfishness of one man. Judge Copeland wouldn't call it selfishness, but that is what it is. . . . It would be wickedly wrong. Their love story must not be wrecked as—as——"

She did not finish the sentence. He looked at her, then rose from his chair.

"It shan't be," he said, quietly.

"You mean—what do you mean?"

But he left the room without replying.

CHAPTER XX

ON an afternoon three days later he came home from his round of visits to find his niece alone in the dining room. She was sitting in the rocker by his own favorite post of observation, the north window.

"Hello, Faith," he said. "What are you doing out here? Is Tom asleep?"

She did not turn her head, but continued to look out of the window.

"Yes," she said.

"Where is Mrs. Powell?"

"She has gone out in my car. Over to her house, I believe."

"Is anything wrong?"

"No."

He stood regarding her thoughtfully. Then he asked, "Your father has been here, hasn't he? I met his car at the end of the lane."

She nodded. He threw off his coat and cap and, crossing the room, sat down beside her.

"Faith," he said, gravely, "look at me. What has your father been saying to you?"

For a moment she met his gaze and tried to smile.

"Oh, nothing, Uncle Eph," she answered, wearily. "I— I am a little tired, I guess. And perhaps a little worried. You mustn't mind me."

"You are worried about him. Is that it?"

She turned away again.

"Please don't ask," she begged.

"But——"

"Please don't! I am trying to decide something, and I must decide it for myself. No one can help me. . . . Please go and leave me. I—I shall be all right again in a little while. Oh, please go!"

He went, but with reluctance. As he opened the sitting room door he looked at her. Her shoulders shook; she was sobbing bitterly.

After supper—Faith had a headache, she said, and had gone to her room for a few minutes' rest—he and Katherine had a moment alone. Mrs. Brady had been running in and out from the kitchen and there were no opportunities for conference during the meal. But now Katherine spoke.

"Ephraim," she whispered, "the crisis has come."

"What crisis?"

"Between Faith and her father. They had a long interview this afternoon. Doctor Parker came with him and stayed for a time. Then the Judge and Faith were alone. He delivered an ultimatum."

"An ultimatum?"

"Yes. That is what it amounts to. I don't know just what was said, but Faith has told me a little. Doctor Parker insists that Judge Copeland must go away, that if he doesn't the consequences to his health may be very serious indeed. He told Faith that; frightened her dreadfully, poor girl. And the Judge absolutely refuses to go."

"Humph! Unless she goes with him, I suppose?"

"Exactly that. As I say, I don't know just what took place, but I gather that he was obstinate. If she will accompany him he will make the effort to save his own life.

If not—then he doesn't consider the effort worth while. . . . Oh, Ephraim!" with scornful impatience, "isn't it plain enough. Can't you imagine what he said—all of it? Why should he care to live any longer? She was his only interest in life and now he had lost her, some one else had taken his place in her affections. He was merely an encumbrance. Let him die, it was the best thing that could happen. . . . Just that sort of thing. Can't you imagine it? Isn't it plain enough, knowing him?"

"Yes."

"And can't you imagine its effect upon her? Ephraim, is it true? Do you think he is in such a serious condition as he says, and as Parker seems to believe?"

Nye shook his head.

"He is tired and feeling the reaction, like the rest of us," he said. "I shouldn't consider him in great danger."

"But Doctor Parker says——"

"Parker would be likely to say what Copeland said first. He is a remarkably fine echo. . . . And Faith—you think——?"

"I don't know. But I am afraid she has made up her mind to do what her father asks. If she leaves Tom——"

"She must not leave him."

"So I say. Can't we do anything, Ephraim? Do you suppose I might have any influence with Judge Copeland? If I went to him and spoke plainly——"

He interrupted her. "Wait!" he said. "Let me think."

"But, if I did——"

"Wait! And don't say any more to me just now. I want to think this out."

He rose from the table and walked to the north window. His hands were in his pockets and upon his face was the

grimmest expression she had ever seen there. She, too, rose and approached him.

"Ephraim," she whispered, hesitatingly, "if only you could find a way. It is to save the happiness, the life-long happiness, of those two. Remember——"

He waved her brusquely away. She went into the other room. When, some time afterward, she again looked out, he was still standing by the window. The next time she looked he had gone, had put on his coat and cap, left the house, and driven off in his automobile, so Mrs. Brady told her.

At that moment he was, as it happened, driving over the road between North Ostable and Ostable Center. He had stopped once since leaving the Dillingham place and that was at the house of Captain Mark Bearse on the Back Road. His call upon Captain Mark was brief, but when it was over and his visitor drove away, the captain stood in the doorway, looking after him, a puzzled and anxious expression upon his face.

Mrs. Hopkins, home again after her siege of nursing, came into the little rear entry.

"For mercy sakes, march into the house and shut that door," she commanded. "Anybody would think it was June instead of winter. Want to catch your death? . . . Well, what did the doctor want? Nobody else taken down, is there?"

Her brother shook his head. "No, not as I know of," he answered.

"Then what—Why, Mark, what makes you look so queer? What *did* Doctor Eph come here for?"

"He came to get somethin' that belonged to him."

"Somethin' that belonged—Oh, that's what you opened

the safe for. Humph! must have been pretty valuable if you kept it in the safe. What was it?"

"Don't know. 'Twas some kind of a paper in a sealed envelope, that's all I know."

"How did you happen to have it?"

Captain Mark looked at her solemnly. "He gave it to me thirteen year ago," he said.

"Thirteen years ago? Why—why, Mark, that was before the time when——"

"No, it was *at* the time. The night before he was arrested. He came to me and asked me to put it in my safe, say nothin' about it to anybody and keep it until he came again to get it, no matter when that might be."

"My sakes alive! And he's never asked for it since—until now?"

"No. He hadn't forgotten it, for I reminded him when he came back here to live; but he said let it stay where it was."

"Well, I never! And you don't know what is in the envelope, nor anything?"

"No."

"And he came and got it to-night, after lettin' it lay for thirteen years. What *do* you suppose he wants it now for?"

Captain Bearse again shook his head.

"That's one more thing I don't know," he declared. "And can't guess, either. I tell you this though, Matilda, it's somethin' important. I never saw Eph Nye look more—er—well, as if he meant business. Never!"

Silverleaf Way in Ostable Center is, in summer, a very cheerful way indeed. The porches of the fine houses bordering it are alive with young people and the windows

ablaze with light. But now most of those houses were closed, the porches deserted and the windows dark. The great maples were bare of leaves and the ice-sheathed twigs clicked and clattered in the raw northwest wind. There were lights in the Copeland house, for that was inhabited all the year. Doctor Nye passed through the gap in the hedge and moved up the walk to the fine colonial front door. His car he had left in a secluded nook two corners below. He had no wish to advertise to Ostable Center the call he intended to make that evening.

He lifted and dropped the brass knocker, a "genuine antique" unearthed and acquired by Faith. It had supplanted the glass-knobbed door bell. The Copeland maid answered the knock. It was dark on the porch, the doctor's cap was pulled low and his coat collar turned up, so she did not recognize him. Nor, apparently, was she particularly impressed by his appearance.

Yes, Judge Copeland was in, she admitted, but he was not feeling very well and she wasn't sure that he could see any one. What name, please?

"Tell him Doctor Nye," said the doctor, stepping past her into the hall. "And say that it is important."

The maid's gasp of surprise was distinctly audible—and excusable. She had been in the Copeland employ a long time.

"Why—why—" she faltered.

"Is he in the living room?" broke in the visitor. "I saw a light there. I can find him. I know the way—or used to."

But that the maid, even under stress of horrified amazement, could not permit.

"I—I'll tell him," she stammered, and hastened on

ahead, Nye following. The Judge, jaded and careworn, was stretched in an easy chair by the library table. He looked up fretfully as she hurried in.

"Well, what is it?" he snapped. "I can't see any one to-night. If it is Captain Snow tell him I have gone to bed. . . . Why! What is the matter with you?"

The maid had no opportunity to explain. Ephraim Nye was already in the doorway.

"Good evening, Judge," he said.

If Satan himself had suddenly walked into that living room the effect upon its owner could scarcely have been more marked. And the comparison is not so greatly exaggerated. Daniel Copeland's brother-in-law had not crossed that threshold in more than thirteen years. For nearly ten of that thirteen, his name was not spoken in that house. Of late it had been spoken and frequently, but never on Copeland's part except with dislike and suspicion. There had been a time, after Faith's accident, when the dislike—or hatred—was camouflaged, for his daughter's sake, with the word "pity," but since Tom Stone's illness and the disclosure of Faith's love affair, this thin pretense had been thrown aside. Judge Copeland believed Ephraim Nye responsible for his family troubles, present as well as past. The fact that Nye had been right and he wrong in the matter of the water supply did not tend to lessen his resentment, rather the contrary. The Honorable Daniel was not accustomed to making mistakes, and publicly acknowledging them.

And now this man—this family black sheep, this fellow who had driven his sister to her death, had disgraced her name and his, had upset his plans for his daughter's future, had humiliated him publicly, and more than once, in the

eyes of all Ostable—this man had the brazen effrontery to visit him in his own house. And why had he come?

There could be but one conceivable reason. The same terrifying thought which had come to him when Nye telephoned a fortnight before now caused him to spring from his chair in panic.

"Faith!" he gasped. "She is not—what has happened?"

Doctor Ephraim raised his hand. "All right, Judge," he said, quietly. "All right. Nothing has happened. Faith is well. I came to see you on another matter."

Copeland's manner changed. He glanced at the wide-eyed maid, at his visitor, and he drew himself erect.

"Um—ah—I see," he said. "You may go, Cordelia. And close the door."

The maid withdrew, to carry the sensational news to the housekeeper and the chauffeur. The door closed after her. Judge Copeland's dignity did not relax.

"Why did you come here?" he asked, frostily.

"That is what I am going to tell you. And I am going to take off my coat. Telling may take some time and it is warm in here and cold outside. With your permission, Judge."

The permission was not given, but he did not wait for it. He tossed his coat and cap upon the table beneath the reading lamp and, pulling forward a chair, sat down. Copeland watched him, his indignation obviously growing.

"Now, Daniel—" began the doctor.

"Just a minute. Is this 'other matter' of yours important?"

"I think so—very."

"Humph! I judge it must be. Otherwise——"

"Otherwise I wouldn't have had the nerve to come to

this house? That is what you were going to say, wasn't it? Well, I agree with you—so far. I never expected to again have the honor of visiting you beneath your own vine and fig tree. An unexpected pleasure for us both, Judge."

Copeland, who had remained standing until now, threw himself into the easy chair.

"Your idea of humor has not changed," he observed disgustedly. "Well, get it over as soon as you can. Get through with it, for heaven's sake!"

"And yours. I intend to, for my own. I came here to-night to talk with you about your daughter and Tom Stone. I like those two young people, Daniel. I am interested in them. They like each other. They are in love with each other. They want to get married. Why shouldn't they?"

Copeland's face was a picture. At first it had been a study in outraged dignity, not unmingled with touches of apprehension. He could not imagine what had brought Ephraim Nye to his home. Faith was not ill, there had not been another accident—Nye had reassured him on those points. But the apprehension had remained. This man had come, so he said, on an important matter. What. . . ? He heard the doctor mention his daughter's name, then the name of young Stone, and his groping imagination seized upon a thought, a horrifying thought. He turned pale.

"Here!" he cried, leaning forward in the chair. "Wait! What are you trying to tell me? She hasn't . . . they haven't——"

He could not speak the words. His caller understood, however, and once more reassured him.

"Oh, no, they are not married yet, Judge," he said. "But they are going to be."

"Going to be! *Going* to be!"

"Yes. At least, I hope they are. And that is what I came to talk with you about. I mean what I say. Why shouldn't they marry? Stone is a clever, even brilliant young fellow. I have made some inquiries about his professional future and it is bright. But we have discussed his good qualities before, when you came storming down to my house to protest against his calling on Faith after the accident. We won't go into them again."

The pallor had left the Copeland face and a brilliant shade of purple was succeeding it. His sudden paralyzing fear that Faith was already married having been proven groundless, he was now furiously angry. His personal affairs, including those of his daughter, had always been sacredly private. It was *lése majesté* to refer to them, unless he did so first. He was only too well aware that Faith's name and that of Cyrenus Stone's son were coupled in whispered gossip from one end of Ostable to the other, but that he could, and did, pretend to contemptuously ignore as too ridiculous for notice. And even his closest friend and echo, Parker, would not have dared to couple those names in his presence. But now, in his own house, a man, *this* man, was not only doing that thing, but presuming to advise—to state that he hoped——

His temper had been simmering ever since the dreadful evening when Faith, without a word to him, went to the Dillingham house to nurse her lover. Now it boiled over. He leaped from his chair and pointed a melodramatic arm at the door.

"Get out of this house," he thundered. "Out, this minute!"

"No, Judge, nor the minute after that. I am not through yet—not half through. I have only begun. Sit down."

The Judge's arm bent and straightened again. "Get out of here!" he repeated. "I'll—I'll——"

"Hush! You make a remarkably fine statue, but this isn't the public square. . . . Sit down. Don't make a scene! You'll only have to unmake it, for I am not going until I have said what I came to say. Good Lord, man, do you suppose I came to this house—*your* house, Dan Copeland—without knowing what I meant to do, and intending to go through with it?"

The pointing hand became a fist. Copeland waved it.

"You dare to talk to me about my daughter!" he spluttered. "You dare to come here—you—you blackguard! Listen to me, Nye!"

Another fist—the doctor's this time—struck the center table a blow. His eyes flashed.

"No!" he declared, fiercely. "I won't listen! For a dozen years you've done the talking and I've kept my mouth shut. I intended to keep it shut forever, but—well, I've changed my mind. This is my night and you're going to listen to *me*. . . . Listen, Dan Copeland, or you'll spend the rest of your life wishing you had."

CHAPTER XXI

IT was the last sentence, the tone in which it was uttered, and the look in the doctor's eyes which caused Judge Copeland to halt in his imperious march to the door. The sentence itself was enigmatical, the tone and look were impressive—even to a person in the Judge's frame of mind. More than all, the fiery emphasis of the speaker was so utterly different from Ephraim Nye's usual quiet, careless drawl that it had an immediate effect. The brandished arm dropped and the Copeland pose became a little less statuesque.

"What—what do you mean by that?" he blurted.

Doctor Ephraim's eyes continued to blaze for an instant, then they softened and his tenseness relaxed. Even at that moment, when the emotions he had held in check so long were at the surface, his sense of the ridiculous was not entirely submerged. He even smiled.

"There, there, Daniel," he observed. "Come back and sit down. This isn't the climax of the third act, where the hero smashes the villain. God knows I am no hero and, no matter what else I may think you, I certainly shouldn't call you a villain. Let's be as sensible as we can. Come back and sit down. . . . Yes, you had better."

There was still just a hint of threat in the tone. Copeland was not afraid exactly—there was no reason why he should be—but he had a curious feeling that to obey might be good policy. Certainly this man must have something

in his sleeve, or he would not speak with such confidence. Then, too, it may be that the Judge himself was dimly conscious of the theatrical absurdity of his own behavior. His sense of humor was not keen, to say the least, but he was accustomed to restraining his emotions; the dignity of his judicial office required that.

That dignity reasserted itself. He walked back to the armchair.

"I—er—I am not well," he muttered, in some confusion. "My doctor tells me my nerves are breaking down. Perhaps, that is why—perhaps I am rather. . . . But never mind. Go on; I'll listen to what you have to say. Provided it proves to be something I should listen to."

"Well, I think it is. Faith——"

Copeland interrupted.

"I will *not* listen to anything concerning my daughter's affair with—with that damned boy of Stone's," he declared, angrily. "It is not your business—nor any one else's except mine and hers."

"And his, of course. You may be partially right, Judge. Ordinarily I should say you were. In fact, I should go farther and say it was no one's business but Faith's and Tom's. But you say it is yours, and that makes it Cyrenus's."

"Cyrenus's! What has he to do with it?"

"He is Tom's father. He probably feels much as you do about the families intermarrying."

Copeland snorted. He did not appear to consider this suggestion worthy of a reply. Doctor Nye went on.

"And so," he continued, "as it is yours and Cyrenus's I am making it mine. After all, I am, in a way, related to one of the families."

The Judge turned to look at him. "You have courage to mention the fact," he sneered.

"Yes? Well, perhaps I shall do more than mention it. That depends on you, rather. Now, Dan, as I said in the beginning, there are no good reasons why those two shouldn't marry and every reason why they should. They would, of course, if there was no interference. They might, in the end, in spite of it. But there is a chance that they might not. That's why I came here. You are the principal—so far the only—interference. You are behaving like a selfish child, if you don't mind my saying so."

The immediate effect of this very frank assertion was overwhelming astonishment. Copeland stared, caught his breath—and then exploded.

"Why—why——" he began. Doctor Ephraim broke in quickly.

"Sshh!" he commanded. "Save the fireworks until I finish. I know you are not well. You are tired and played out, like the rest of us. A change and complete rest will do you good. Go away, by all means. But don't drag Faith with you. Don't talk about dying and all that sort of stuff with the idea of working upon her sympathies and making her feel that it is her duty to leave Tom and go with you. She shouldn't leave him yet. She should stay with him, for his sake and her own. *He* has *really* been sick, Dan. *He* might talk of dying with some excuse. And he is not entirely out of the woods yet. He needs her a whole lot more than you do."

Judge Copeland was, obviously, fighting another overwhelming impulse to leave the armchair and become statuesque. His face was purple and his fingers clutched the upholstery. He swallowed hard.

"I—I will *not* listen to this——" he began. His brother-in-law lifted a warning hand.

"Yes, you will," he said, firmly. "You will listen if I have to hold you by main strength. Can't you understand that my coming here to-night wasn't a hasty impulse exactly? I came because I had something to say. Do you think I *wanted* to come?"

Once more the tone and look, as well as the words, had their effect. Copeland's clutch upon the chair arms relaxed a little. But his temper did not relax. His voice shook as he answered.

"Say it then," he ordered. "Speak out and be done with it. But if you expect me to sit still and listen to your insults and—and lying insinuations, you are expecting too much. What is it you are asking me to do? Give my daughter to Tom Stone? Well, I won't. She may marry him, thanks to your influence. You seem to have some confounded hypnotic attraction for women. You always did have it. You trapped my poor sister into——"

"Hush!"

"It is the truth. And I know that Faith, for some crazy reason, has come to believe in you. Yes, and like you. Like you, by the Lord! She told me so, herself. And it is possible that she may throw me over—her own father—and take up with you and that Stone scamp. But I won't give her up to him and you without a fight. . . . Why—why, it is unbelievable, the whole thing. Your coming here to-night, Faith's sending you here——"

"Stop, Dan, stop! She didn't send me."

"I don't believe it. Who did, then; Stone?"

"No. No one knew that I was coming. If you show some symptoms of common sense no one need know that

I have been here. No one except your servants, and you can easily invent some excuse to satisfy them. I came here, of my own accord, to ask you not to oppose Faith's marriage with Tom. I want you to let those two young people be happy together. That is what I am asking of you now—and I expect you to do it. . . . You must do it."

"I must! Why; as a favor to you?"

"No. As part payment of a debt, if you want to put it that way."

The Judge's expression changed. He stared, shook his head, and broke into a laugh—not a pleasant laugh.

"A debt!" he repeated. "A debt that *I* owe *you!* Good heavens above! . . . Oh," as another thought came to him, "I see. You think because you happened to be on hand when Faith was hurt and because you took care of her afterward that I should do this thing. I won't. I know why you are asking it; you and old Stone are bosom friends. Birds of a feather. Well, I am grateful to you for what you did for Faith. I told you so. I wanted to pay you, I tried to. But, if I remember, you refused to accept even thanks. I told you I would not be under any obligations to you——"

"And I told you you couldn't help yourself. It isn't that. And don't make another mistake. The Stones, Cyrenus and Tom, have nothing to do with my coming here. I never expected to come here. The thing you are forcing me to tell you I never meant to tell a living soul. I shouldn't tell it now—for my own sake. But—Faith is a fine girl. Tom is a splendid fellow. I will not see their present and future killed by the prejudices and interference of other people. I have seen too much of that in my life.

You've got to pay my debt, Daniel. You've *got* to. And that is the only way you can pay it."

Judge Copeland was impressed by the tremendous earnestness of this speech, impressed and puzzled, but his own resentment came surging back, and grew as he replied.

"I don't know what you are talking about," he declared. "You say I owe you some debt or other. If it isn't on account of Faith's recovery from that accident, what is it? A debt! Good Lord! The only debt I owe you is one of longer standing and on the other side of the ledger. You married my sister. You came here to this town. You disgraced yourself; you shamed me; you disgraced and killed her; you—you took money belonging to your closest friends, men and women that believed in you and trusted you; you——"

"No! I did not."

The denial was so sharp and commanding that it halted Daniel Copeland's torrent of speech in full flow. He stopped in the middle of a word—stopped and stared.

"What?" he gasped.

"I did not steal that church money, Dan."

"*What?* . . . Why—why, you are crazy!"

"No. I was very nearly crazy at the time. And it may be that I acted like a fool; I have sometimes thought so since. But, sane or crazy, I didn't take the money belonging to the church fund. Some one else did that."

The Judge was still staring. The man sitting opposite him did not speak or look like a lunatic. He was tremendously in earnest, his tone was low and his manner quiet. Yet—yet he must be insane.

"Ephraim Nye," cried Copeland, "what—*what* are you trying to tell me?"

"The truth—at last."

"The truth! That you didn't. . . . Why, you admitted the theft, yourself."

"No. I said that check was signed by me. I lied. It was not. It was a forgery. . . . Brace up, Dan; this is going to hurt."

"A forgery! A forgery! You mean— Who—who——?"

"Can't you guess? . . . Brace up. I am the only one who knows it—in Ostable, that is. And only a few elsewhere. Fanny signed my name to that check."

Judge Copeland did not start. He did not spring from his chair or brandish his good right arm or burst into indignant denial. He did none of these things. He merely looked. It is possible that he did not fully comprehend. Doctor Ephraim leaned forward.

"She signed it," he said. "When you and the others showed me the check at the church that night I told you that I had never seen it before, and knew nothing whatever about it. That was the truth. But even then I was fearful. I began to suspect—for I had cause. I went home and asked her about it. She denied any knowledge of it—at first. I did not press my questions—she was too sick for that—but before morning she told me of her own accord. She told me everything. She told when she did it—and why."

Copeland was beginning to comprehend at last. The monstrous statements which this man was making had forced themselves into his understanding. He heard and he understood—but belief was no part of that understanding. His suspicion that his brother-in-law was insane was now a conviction, that was all. He rose to his feet.

"Nye," he faltered, "I—I—Excuse me just a minute. I——"

He had some vague intention of calling the chauffeur, or telephoning for the sheriff—something of that sort. The doctor read his thought and, rising, caught his arm.

"Daniel," he said, firmly, "stop! Don't be foolish. Look at me. And listen. No, I haven't gone crazy. What I am telling you is the absolute truth. And a truth very easy to prove. You and I don't want any one else to know it. Sit down again and hear the rest."

The Judge at that moment experienced a queer sensation, a sensation as of a cold hand at the base of his brain, sending an icy chill throughout his body. He met Ephraim Nye's gaze and that quiet, steadfast—yes, pitying—look was not the glare of a lunatic. The chill clutch at his brain tightened. For the first time a doubt—a horrible doubt crept into his mind.

"You *are* crazy!" he cried. "You must be! Are you trying to tell me that—that my sister——"

"Yes, Daniel. Just that."

"You—you liar! You——"

"Steady! I am not lying. Think, and you will know I am not. Think! Do you suppose I should say this, after all these years, if I couldn't prove it? . . . Sit down and we'll go through with the whole miserable business. I am sorry for you, Daniel, God knows I am, but you must hear the rest of it now. Sit down."

Judge Copeland sat down. He was not conscious of doing so. He was not clearly conscious of anything, except the words which Ephraim Nye was speaking.

"Fanny confessed it all to me that night," Nye continued. "You will remember that it was her last conscious

night. She was delirious next day and until her death. But she was quite rational then and she told me. She had forged my name, had traced it from my own signature. She was in terrible trouble. She needed the money to pay for a necklace which she had—well—taken from a jewelry house in New York. She was at a hotel there, you remember. She went to the jeweler's, looked at a number of things, made one or two small purchases, saw the necklace, was tempted, and, well, she took it away with her. Then, back at her hotel, she began to realize what she had done. She was almost insane—literally. And ill—dying even then, I suppose we may say. She lost her head completely. She was afraid to keep the necklace, she couldn't pay for it. So, in a panic, she threw it overboard from one of the ferry boats. Is it clear so far?"

Copeland gasped. "Are you—are you trying to tell me that—that my sister was a common thief?" he demanded. "That she stole——"

"Wait. That isn't the only thing of the kind I must tell you, Dan. It is a dreary mess, the whole of it. Fanny, poor girl, was a kleptomaniac. She was insane on the subject of pretty things. I couldn't buy them for her. A country doctor's income—and mine was above the average in those days—is not large enough to warrant indulgence in diamond rings and pearl brooches. Twice before I had had to settle for—well, for indiscretions on her part. People wondered why I didn't keep a better establishment, own a better car and all that. They thought me mean, I suppose. Do you remember that emerald pin that Fanny had? It was sold, along with the other things, to help make up a little of the church shortage. It was an Easter present from me, we said. It wasn't, Judge. I

couldn't afford presents of such value. That pin came from Somes and Feversham of Boston. I settled for it at their price—to save my wife from exposure and disgrace. And it took every cent I had saved for over two years. And there was another case, much the same. . . . Do you begin to see now?"

Daniel Copeland did not answer. He was beyond speech. His face was chalk white and he looked, as he sat huddled in the armchair, like a man nearer seventy than fifty.

"To get back to the necklace and the check," went on the doctor. "She threw the necklace overboard, as I said. A crazy performance, but she *was* crazy—and dying, in reality. Then the representatives of the jewelry firm came to her hotel in New York. They knew she had taken the necklace; their man told her so. If she paid for it—why, all right. If not—then the alternative. She couldn't give it back; it was gone. There is no use going into details. You can see what she did. She knew of the money in the parish fund. I was the treasurer of that fund. It was in the bank here. She had a check book on that bank. She forged my name, as treasurer, to a check made out to 'Bearer.' The jewelers would not take the check, she was sure, or if they did, of course when it went through the bank it would be traced to her—and them. So she must get the money. Lowell Raymond was an old friend of hers—and yours, Dan. She went to his New York office. He cashed the check for her, of course. The next day, as you know, he started West and died on the train. . . . There! There is the story. . . . Now, Daniel——"

But Copeland interrupted. He lifted a shaking hand. "Wait—wait!" he begged. "If this—this hellish thing is

true I don't see—I don't understand why you—why. . . . You admitted that the check was yours! You didn't deny it at the trial. You went to—to prison. I don't believe it! It isn't true! You've made up this—all these lies to—to——"

"Daniel! Come! . . . You know they are not lies. And if you want proof there are the jewelry people; they can give it to you. There is proof enough—and so easy to get."

Judge Copeland groaned.

"But—but why did you do it?" he demanded. "Why didn't you speak? Why didn't you tell some one—tell me? You and I were close friends."

Doctor Ephraim shook his head. "Why, perhaps not so very close, then, Judge," he said. "You were pretty certain at the time—and pretty bitter. If you hadn't been so dead sure and so anxious to send me to jail perhaps I might have. . . . But I didn't. After all, I couldn't. I had to go through with it."

"Fanny! I—why, I would have done anything for her. I can't believe it! I can't!"

The doctor paid no attention to this outburst. He went on, quietly.

"I had to go through with it," he repeated. "It was up to me. I couldn't do anything else. How could I tell the truth? She was dying when she told me. I knew it. And—well, then she died. Could I have told the world that my wife had been a thief—and a forger? I pitied her, Judge. She was not really responsible. That sort of thing is a form of disease. And, even when she was telling me, she was begging me to save her. To save her name. Of course she didn't realize that I could save

it only in one way. . . . Oh, well! I saved it. It seemed best then. Perhaps it was. Anyhow, I did it."

"But—good heavens! Good heavens! You ruined your whole life!"

"Well, as a matter of fact, my life didn't mean much to me. It had come to mean precious little. There was a time when I looked forward to living. Then—well, I didn't much care. But that is over, the whole of it. . . . And now, Daniel, I want you to understand why I have told you this. I never intended to tell it. I——"

But again the Judge broke in.

"And all these years—all this time I have been—I have thought of you as—I have called you——"

"Oh, never mind that. Practically every one else has called me the same things; you were with the great majority, Dan. . . . But, see here," he added, with sudden sharpness, "don't make any mistake. Don't think I am crying baby or begging for pity, or anything of that sort. I am no martyr. I am more of a fool, if it comes to that. I did the thing because I am Eph Nye. Just as I came back to this town three years ago, because I knew it was the one place on earth where no one expected me, and that tempted me to come and make a fight and see what the end would be. I don't do things that other people—sensible people—do. I was born with a perverse streak. . . . Humph! Children showing such tendencies should be chloroformed; it would save the world—and them—a whole lot of trouble."

Daniel Copeland had not heard much of this characteristic bit of self-analysis. In the whirl of his brain one thought kept spinning to the top.

"I can't see—I can't understand——" he groaned.

"You did this for her—my sister. But she was dead. And yet you didn't speak—you let us—you let me—you went to prison—oh, I can't understand!"

"Don't try. It isn't worth it. It is over and done with long ago. Practically speaking, no one knows it but we, ourselves, and of course—you understand this, Daniel—no one else must ever know it. But you see what I meant when I spoke about a debt you owed me. I'm not collecting it for myself, but I want to collect for Faith and Tom. If you figure that you—as Fanny's brother—owe me anything at all you can pay the bill by using common sense about those two children. In my opinion you will be getting as good a son-in-law as a man could wish and I know you will realize it some day. But now—just now—I want you to stop playing on Faith's sympathies and frightening her with stories about your being a dying man. You are not, you know; you may take my professional word for that. Go away and rest. Have a good time. But before you go just hint to Faith that you have thought it over and realize that Tom is a fine fellow—in spite of your prejudice against his family name—and that he needs her more than you do. . . . That is all, Daniel, just now. . . . Only do think it over. You mustn't forget."

He rose from his chair. Copeland did not seem to realize that he did so. The Judge still sat, huddled in the armchair, gazing at nothing. Nye looked down at him. Then, from the inner pocket of his coat, he took an envelope. His own name was written upon it in his own handwriting.

"One thing more, Judge," he said. "Here is a letter for you."

Tearing open the envelope he took from it another,

also bearing a name. This he laid upon the table beside his brother-in-law. The latter dazedly picked it up.

"What?" he stammered. "What is it?"

"That I don't know. You will recognize the writing. . . . Yes, it is from Fanny. That night—after the committee meeting at the church, when she told me about the check and the rest, she told me she had written you. She said—she said a number of things. Poor girl, she was ill, and desperate, and I imagine—yes, I know, for she told me—she had thought of killing herself, but she did not have the courage. She had written that letter to you then, she said. After she died, before they took me away, I found this envelope with your name on it in the drawer of her desk."

Judge Copeland looked at the envelope in his hand. His eyes were wet.

"Yes—yes," he said, slowly, "it is her writing. . . . But why didn't you give it to me? Why have you kept it all this time?"

"Well, you can understand why, if you think a little. I don't know what is in it, as I said, but perhaps we can both guess. I imagine she has written you the whole story. When I found it she was dead. I had made up my mind to play the game through. I knew that the place would be searched, so I put that envelope in this other, with my name on it, and gave it in charge of a friend I could depend upon, to keep until I called for it. If I died before calling he was to burn it. To-night, on my way here, I stopped and got it. This friend doesn't, of course, know what it is or who wrote it. There it is, Judge. Perhaps you will care to read it sometime—by and by. . . . Good night, Dan. . . . I am sorry for you. I am sorry enough

that I had to tell you the miserable yarn, but I thought—well, I have explained that. . . . Good night. I can find my way out. I used to know it pretty well, you remember."

He took his overcoat and cap from the table and walked quietly from the room and the house. When the maid knocked at the door of the living room, an hour afterward, Judge Copeland was still sitting in the armchair, the unopened letter in his hand.

CHAPTER XXII

HENRY WARD BEECHER PAYSON, hearing the familiar clank and rattle of the Nye car as it turned from the main road into Bayberry Lane, stumped from the kitchen door and was in the yard when his employer arrived. The light from the window shone upon the latter's face.

"Hello!" exclaimed Henry. "What's the matter, Doctor Eph? Ain't no more typhoid fever breakin' out, is there? You look as if you'd been through the war."

Nye did not answer. His only remark was a request for Henry to open the barn door. Mr. Payson did not move.

"I say you look as if you'd been through the war," he repeated, anxiously. "Ain't sick yourself, be you? I been expectin' it. It's that fancy, fussed-up cookin' you've had to eat lately. Them rich messes ain't fit for nobody but foreigners; human stomachs can't stand 'em."

"I'm not sick, Henry. Open the door; I want to run the car in."

"Huh! No such luck—not yet. . . . But say, Doctor Eph; what does ail you? You look as if you'd come from the battle of Bull Run."

The doctor shrugged. "Appomattox, I hope," he muttered.

"Eh? Abbie who?"

"Oh, nothing, Henry. By the way, didn't I mention

opening the barn door? It seems to me I remember saying something of that kind."

"Yes. Oh yes, you told me to open it. But there ain't no use, Doc. I wisht to the land there was, but there ain't —not if I know you. Vasco Rose's brother—what's his name?—Joe Rose—telephoned about an hour ago; wants you to come right up there, he does."

"Oh!"

"Yes. And you'll go, of course, no matter if it kills you."

"But it won't, you see. I'll be back some time or other."

"Humph! 'Nother young Portygee, I presume likely?"

"Another bud in the Rose garden, Henry."

"Sho. There ain't no *blight* up there, I'll say that. Well, good night, Doc. Take care of yourself."

It was after nine the next morning before the doctor returned. Faith, pale and worn, but happier too, because of Tom, told him that the latter was feeling better than at any other time since his seizure. He had eaten all the breakfast allowed him and had asked for more. Mrs. Powell was out, she added. She had telephoned for her car and chauffeur and had gone over to her own home on an errand. Nye was too tired to be greatly interested. He ate a few mouthfuls and then went to his room to try for a little sleep. He realized that he needed it.

But he would have been more interested, and he would certainly not have slept, had he known where Katherine Powell was at that moment. The Powell car was then standing at the curb before the Copeland door and its owner was in the Copeland living room.

Katherine had made up her mind to try her powers of persuasion with the Judge on behalf of his daughter. She

and Faith had had another long talk and it seemed to her quite evident that the latter was on the point of surrender. Doctor Parker's pessimistic statements concerning her father's health, his evident anxiety and absolute certainty of the need of change and rest, coupled with Copeland's melancholia, and stubborn determination not to go away unless she accompanied him—all these had driven the poor girl to the verge of despair.

"I suppose I must do it," she said. "I can't bear to think of going away—now, but it is my duty to father. He looks so sick, and he is so dreadfully despondent. If anything should happen to him I should always blame myself. No, I must go. There is no other way. But—but—oh, how can I!"

"Has your father intimated where he might go and how long he means to be away?"

"No. . . . But Doctor Parker said something about a long sea voyage. He spoke of a trip to Japan, perhaps around the world. Father needs at least a year's rest, he says. . . . Think of it—a year! If—if only I might know that at the end of it I could come back to Tom and that father would be—different—willing to—to—— But he won't. It will be just the same then as it is now. He will never be reconciled to my marrying Cyrenus Stone's son. I know it."

Katherine laid a hand upon hers. "Faith," she said, earnestly, "I wouldn't, ordinarily, dream of interfering between you and your father. He has been a good father to you and you love each other. But—well, I am ever so much older than you are and I know things. I have had experiences of my own. If you care for Tom—as I know you do——"

She paused. Faith only sobbed.

"As I know you do, and as I know he cares for you, then *no* one—your father nor any one—must be allowed to come between you. Judge Copeland's objection is due to nothing but prejudice. It is unreasonable. You shouldn't—you mustn't—yield to it."

"But—father may die. He says he knows he is going to."

"And Ephraim—Doctor Nye, I mean—is sure that he will not. Faith, once in my life I made a dreadful mistake. Mine was a little different; there was a misunderstanding, too. But my parents were prejudiced, as your father is. And I thought my duty . . . Oh, well! We mustn't talk about that. . . . Faith, you haven't promised your father that you will leave Tom and go with him?"

"No. No, I haven't really promised—not yet. Mrs. Powell, please don't think I am just a weak, silly girl who doesn't know her own mind. If father were himself, if he were well and it was just a matter of his giving his consent, I shouldn't hesitate at all. I should marry Tom whenever he wanted me to. But now it is all so terrible. If father *should* stay here, as he says he will, and die—I—I . . . Oh, dear! What shall I do? What *can* I do?"

"You can wait a little longer. Perhaps Judge Copeland may change his mind. Perhaps something or some one may induce him to change it."

"Why—what do you mean? Who? Not Uncle Ephraim. Father hates him. You see——"

"Yes, I know. But wait. And let me think. There may be a way. Keep up your courage, dear. And, above all, don't let Tom see that you are worried."

This conversation had taken place the evening before, while Doctor Nye and his brother-in-law were having their fateful interview. And, as a result, Katherine had gone the next morning straight to the Copeland house. She went early, for court was in session, and she wished to catch the Judge before he left for the courthouse.

He was in the living room when the maid ushered her in. She was shocked at his appearance. For the first time she began to share Faith's apprehension. He looked more than tired and haggard; he looked that morning, if not like a dying man, surely like a very sick one. She began to fear she had made a mistake in coming just then upon such an errand.

He bade her a listless good day and asked her to be seated.

"Well, Mrs. Powell?" he said, "what is it?"

She hesitated. "I came to speak with you about a—a very personal matter," she faltered. "But perhaps I had better not speak of it now. . . . Are you—are you ill, Judge Copeland?"

He shook his head. "I don't know," he answered. "I suppose I am. But I can hear what you have to say. I must go down to the court before long, but I have a few minutes. Go on, please."

She still hesitated. "It is—it is not a matter of my own," she began. "Probably you will think it not my affair at all, and that I am impertinent and presuming. I don't mean to be, Judge Copeland. I came to—to——"

He interrupted. "I can guess," he said. "You came to speak about Faith and young Stone. . . . Did Ephraim Nye send you?"

She started. "Ephraim Nye!" she repeated. "Why no,

of course not. He doesn't know I am here. No one knows. Why should you think he sent me?"

He sighed. "I thought he might have done so," he said. "He came to see me, himself, last night."

"He did! Ephraim Nye came here?"

"Yes. . . . Well, Mrs. Powell, I suppose you want me to stop interfering between Faith and Stone. I think I shall not interfere any longer."

"Judge!"

"Yes. Oh, yes, I think so. I suppose so. It doesn't seem to matter—much."

"Not matter. Why, Judge Copeland!"

"I know. . . . Mrs. Powell, if you don't mind, I had rather not talk about it at this time. I have had a shock. I have been through a terrible experience. I really am in no condition to consider or discuss—anything. You will excuse me?"

She rose. "Of course," she said, hurriedly. "I will go at once. I am so sorry I came. I did not know——"

"Naturally. No one knows. . . . Just a moment, please. Mrs. Powell——"

"Yes, Judge Copeland?"

He hesitated regarding her in an odd, absent way, as if dimly aware that the question he was to ask was a strange one, and yet almost as if he were compelled to ask it. Then he went on.

"You have known Ephraim Nye for some time now," he said. "What do you think of him?"

"Think of him! What do I think of Doctor Nye? . . . I don't—— Why, what do you mean?"

"Do you think him a good man? I know you consider him a good doctor. What else do you think him?"

She did not answer immediately. The color surged to her face.

"I—I don't understand," she faltered.

"I mean—I am wondering if other people—unprejudiced people—comparative strangers—have thought of him as—as I have. You must excuse me. I am not exactly—well, rational this morning, perhaps. But all night I have been——. Mrs. Powell, as an unprejudiced person, what sort of character do you judge Ephraim's Nye's to be?"

She thought she understood at last. Ephraim had been there, he and this man had had a scene, a stormy scene, a quarrel undoubtedly. And, by some means or other, Ephraim had won. But he had left behind him a hatred even more bitter than had existed previously. Copeland was depending upon her to justify this hatred. Possibly he thought she might not know of the old scandal and Nye's disgrace. Or had forgotten that she knew it. That seemed impossible, but it might be. Very well, he should have his answer. She was only too glad, and proud, to give it. She looked him straight in the face.

"I think him one of the best men I ever knew," she cried. "And I have known him a long while, much longer than you may think, Judge Copeland. At one time, when he and I were both young, we were friends—very close friends. Then—then we did not see each other for years. I came back to Ostable, to my brother-in-law's cottage—and I found him here. I was surprised, of course. I knew what—what had happened. I couldn't imagine why he had come—here, of all places. But I think I know now why he came. He came to fight down his disgrace, to

work out his salvation in the very hardest spot of all. It is characteristic of him. He is brave, and proud, and—yes, stubborn, I suppose—and perhaps Quixotic. He was always like that. But, Judge Copeland, in spite of everything, things we can neither of us understand and probably never shall, I know that Ephraim Nye is a good man. I *know* he is!"

He had been listening, but still in that listless, absent way. Now, however, he looked up.

"You know?" he repeated. "Why—what do you know?"

"I mean I know he is. I feel that he is. In spite of everything, I feel it. Of course, it is different with you. You were here when that dreadful thing happened. Your sister——"

He interrupted sharply. "Don't!" he cried.

"I won't. I understand. But do let me say this: when I think of him as I used to know him, as I used to see him in the hospital with the poor sick people, and as I have seen him here since, during the typhoid, and with your daughter and with Tom—why, it seems impossible to believe that he ever committed a dishonest act. He is the soul of honor—he *is*. There are times when I can't believe that he ever did that thing. . . . Oh, I know—I know what you will say. It is the truth, I suppose; he admitted it, so——"

Judge Copeland's arm shot forward and gripped her wrist.

"Stop!" he ordered. "For heaven's sake don't say that again! It isn't the truth. It is a lie. He did not take that church money."

She shrank away from him.

"Why—why, Judge Copeland!" she gasped. "Are you —you must be——"

"I am not insane. Last night when he told me, I—I thought at first that he was. But he wasn't. I may be—I feel almost as if I should soon be. But it is the truth—he did not take it. . . . His wife—my sister—took it. And he went to—to prison for her."

He dropped her wrist and stood there, shaking from head to foot. She gazed at him horror-stricken. He was the first to recover.

"I don't know why I told you this," he burst forth. "I don't. I shouldn't have done it. He ordered me not to. But I had to—I felt as if. . . . I *am* insane! I must be. . . . Won't you go? Won't you go now, please?"

But she shook her head. She was as pale as he and almost as greatly agitated, but she remained where she was.

"No," she cried. "No, Judge Copeland. If what you say is true—— Oh, but it can't be!"

"It is. Don't ask any more. Go, please."

"No, I can't go. You must tell me the rest. You must. Do you understand? I must hear the rest—all of it."

He stumbled to the armchair and sank into it.

"Very well," he sighed. "Perhaps you must. I have told you so much—you may as well hear it all. Sit down. I'll tell you."

She did not sit. She remained standing. He told a portion of the story which the doctor had told him, told it briefly, and without emphasis or comment.

"There!" he said, in conclusion, "that is all. Now you know."

She was silent. He sighed, wearily.

"You must not mention this to any one," he said. "He

doesn't want it told. It is his secret, I suppose. He mustn't know that I have told you. I don't know why I did tell you."

She said nothing. Slowly she turned to the door. There she turned again.

"You are sure——?" she faltered. "The proof——?"

"There is proof enough, if I needed it. . . . But I don't. I know it is true. . . . It explains things."

She nodded. "Yes," she said, slowly. "Yes, it does. . . . Good-by, Judge Copeland. I am very sorry for you."

She went away. The chauffeur opened the car door for her and she ordered him to drive to her own home.

"I shall be there a little while," she said. "Then you will take me back to Doctor Nye's."

She could not go to his house at once. She felt that she must be alone and think. She could not meet him yet. She was overwhelmed, conscience-stricken. She—*she* had believed him guilty. She who should have known—should have known——

These were her thoughts. But there was another, another which kept intruding, shouldering aside all the rest.

He had sacrificed his freedom, the honor of his name, his future, for that other woman—for Fanny Copeland.

How—oh, *how* he must have loved her!

CHAPTER XXIII

YES, that was the thought which returned the oftenest, which carried with it the deepest sting. Her own sense of unworthiness, of bitter shame, of humiliation—these were crushing, but, somehow, their pangs she could bear because with them was the sense of joy in his vindication, of glory in the thing he had done. But this—the conviction, the certain knowledge that his love for his dead wife had been so great as to inspire such sacrifice—it was torture.

She had long since ceased—or thought she had—to be jealous of Fanny Copeland. She had even forgiven her the part she had played in separating Ephraim Nye and herself. She was to blame for that—she, Katherine Minot. If she had not yielded to a mistaken sense of duty to her parents, if she had not permitted petty misunderstanding to help in that yielding, if she had been wise enough and strong enough to understand that he, too, had a duty to perform—then the separation might never have been. She did not—she could not—blame this other woman for loving him, and for fighting for him. She blamed herself for not carrying on the battle, for permitting anything—circumstance, misunderstanding, pride, a rival's scheming—to come between them.

She had not resented his marrying. She, too, had married. But, somehow or other, she had never felt that his marriage, more than hers, was a love match. She had married because—well, because her parents had so urgently

wished it, and because of a feeling of indifference—as if, having thrown away that which might have made life worth while, nothing else mattered greatly. And, without any real reason, she had believed that he had been similarly reckless and indifferent.

Her life with her husband had not been happy. After the first few months he had gone his way and she hers. They had little in common, there were no children and she was glad of that. During the last year or two before his death he had been with her very little. And when he died her grief was not keen. She had wealth and health and youth, she traveled much, and then, at last, had come to Ostable to make her home there. But always that feeling of indifference remained. She had her life to live, but she was not greatly interested in life. The interest which might have been was gone—she had thrown it away.

She heard of Nye's crime and imprisonment with horror, and at first with absolute disbelief. Then when she learned of its truth, that he had confessed his guilt, forced to believe, she still found excuses for him. She thought she understood, in a measure. He was poor, his wife had been frivolous and, no doubt, extravagant. The same feelings of recklessness and indifference which were her own, had led him into debt and its consequence.

Then they met again, there at North Ostable. Since then she had seen him often. He had been hard and bitter and, at times, almost rude to her, but she paid little heed to this. She thought she understood. It was his pride, and his determination not to permit her name to be smirched, not to permit it to be coupled with his. He had said so, and more than once. And she had been equally determined to show herself his friend, to let him see that she still be-

lieved in him, to aid him in his fight for self-respect and in forcing respect from the community which had seen him disgraced.

Further than this she had not analyzed her own feelings. Now they needed no analysis. She realized that she was more deeply in love with him than ever, had never ceased to love him, and had deceived herself with the belief that he had never ceased to love her—had actually never loved any one else.

And that morning she had been undeceived, had learned that his disgrace and imprisonment had been a voluntary offering on his part for the sake of that other. He had loved his wife, after all—had loved her so devotedly that he would not deign to save his own honor by sacrificing hers.

She remembered now what Fanny had told her in the letter she had written. She did not believe it then, she was forced to believe it now. They had loved each other, those two, and she—Katherine—had been the interloper, the casual distraction. The jealousy returned—she hated Fanny Copeland. Alive she had merely disliked her; now, dead, she hated her. And with the hate was the sense of shame and abasement. She had been unworthy. Ephraim Nye had been great and splendid and wonderful—and she whose belief in his integrity should never have been shaken, who should have known him incapable of dishonor or dishonesty, had accepted his silence as an admission of guilt. He knew she had so accepted it—that was the worst of all. It put a new interpretation upon his bitterness and coldness toward her. She was unworthy and he knew it.

But now he must know that she also had come to know it. She would—she must—confess it all to him, that she

had learned his secret, what she thought of the splendor of his bravery and sacrifice—and, ah, what she was thinking of her own weak lack of faith.

And then she would go away. At once—and for a time indeterminate. Go somewhere—as far from Ostable and from him as railways or ships could take her. Living, Fanny Copeland had won him from her; dead, hers still was the victory.

These were the conclusions she reached, thinking there alone in her room, with the winter sunshine streaming in at the window. She would go to him at once and tell him. She would leave his house that very day. But first she must find some one, some capable woman, who could take her place as a companion for Faith.

It was then she remembered hearing Henry Payson—or was it Captain Bearse?—say that Mrs. Hopkins had come back to her house. Matilda Hopkins would be exactly the sort of woman to take that place. Faith liked her, Doctor Nye liked her, she was sensible and capable and good-natured and kind. She would go and see her—she would go at once.

Matilda was not at home when she reached the Bearse house. Captain Mark was, however, and he asked her to come in and wait.

"Matildy's gone down to the store," he explained. "She took the car and went cruisin' on her own hook. Don't know what sort of a v'yage she'll make. She ain't made many trips in that auto without me to take a trick at the wheel if 'twas necessary. But I was busy down cellar, sawin' some wood, and she was set on goin', so I said 'Heave ahead.' If she don't run on the rocks, or have a collision in the fairway, she'll be back in port in just a few

minutes. Come in where it's warm and wait for her, Mrs. Powell. What's the news down your way? How's Eph? He and I haven't had any checkers for a consider'ble spell. I've missed 'em."

She told him that all was going well at the Dillingham house. Then she announced the errand which had brought her there. Did the captain think his sister might be willing to take her place as companion to Faith Copeland?

"It will be for only a few days," she explained. "Not more than a week, at the most. Mr. Stone is so much better now that he will soon need no nurses. I promised Judge Copeland that Faith should not be left alone there, that is all. . . . Perhaps you may not like to have your sister run away and leave you again, Captain Bearse. She has only just returned from nursing some one else, I understand."

Captain Mack grinned. "That's all right," he declared. "Since that typhoid fever struck town I've got so used to bein' my own cook and steward that I feel kind of queer to have anybody else in the galley. And Matilda's been makin' so many—hum—what you might call personal remarks about the way that galley's been kept since she's been away that I didn't know but either I'd have to jump overboard or she would. You see, she came home sort of unexpected and I hadn't had a chance to swab decks. She's been scrubbin' and sputterin' ever since. If she goes to Doctor Eph's we'll both have a rest, won't we? . . . But why are you leavin' there, Mrs. Powell? Aren't sick, are you?"

"Oh, no!"

"Sure? Seems to me you look kind of—well, peaked and pulin', as my grandmother used to say. I never knew

exactly what 'pulin' ' meant, and I don't know's I know yet. If it isn't all right I apologize. . . . But you do look sick, or tired, or somethin', this mornin', that's a fact."

She smiled, faintly. "Perhaps I am tired," she said. "I am thinking of going away—for a rest."

"I want to know! Travelin', you mean?"

"It may be. I am not sure where I shall go."

He could see that she was not inclined to talk, and so they sat in silence for a few moments. Then she spoke.

"Captain Bearse," she said, "you have always been a staunch friend of Doctor Nye's, haven't you?"

He looked at her in some surprise. "Yes," he replied. "Why?"

"Oh, I was thinking, that is all. You were his friend all through that dreadful time when—when——"

"When the church money was taken? Yes, I was."

"And—and afterwards. When he was in prison."

"Sartin. Why not?"

"Oh, you would! You should, of course. Please don't think I meant anything else."

He was frowning slightly. This was the subject upon which Mark Bearse was touchiest.

"I was his friend, then," he said, crisply, "just the same as I am now, and that is as much as he'll let me be. I would have been more, if I could. That was when he needed friends."

"Yes. . . . Yes, I know it. Captain Bearse, your sister, Mrs. Hopkins, once said something which led me to think you had always been doubtful of—of——"

"Of what? Of Eph Nye's stealin' that money?"

"Why—yes. Your sister said——"

"I don't know what she said. And I don't care. I never had any doubts at all."

"Oh! . . . Oh, I must have misunderstood. I thought——"

"Maybe you are misunderstandin' now. I never doubted that he didn't steal it. I know he didn't."

She caught her breath quickly. "You know he didn't!" she repeated. "*You* know it?"

"Eh? Yes, I know it. What makes you ask it that way? Anybody with common sense ought to have known it, anybody that knew him."

She did not speak, she did not dare trust herself to do so. Possibly he misinterpreted her silence, for he went on.

"I know darned well he didn't take it," he reiterated, savagely. . . . "Hum . . . well, I beg your pardon for swearin', Mrs. Powell, but that thing makes me hot. My glory! when I think of . . . But there! I've been over a whole lot of this world, wet or dry. I've met all kinds of folks, afloat or ashore, bossed 'em and been bossed and worked 'em and worked for 'em and with 'em. A sea cap'n has to learn to pick men and judge 'em—he *has* to. I always said I could tell a crook after I'd known him a fortni't. And I've known Eph Nye ever since he was a boy. . . . Look here, Mrs. Powell, a fish can't sing hymns, can it? No, by glory, it can't! because it ain't framed up to sing. And Ephraim Nye couldn't steal. He couldn't. He ain't built that way. . . . Whew! I didn't mean to holler. I know you aren't deaf. Excuse me."

She was regarding him with a curious expression; there was—if he had known it—admiration and shame and envy in that look. She sighed.

"You are a friend, Captain Bearse," she declared. "A real friend. I am glad for you."

"Glad for me? What do you mean by that?"

"I mean that the consciousness of having been a true friend, faithful always, is a wonderful possession, something to be proud of and grateful for. You have it, and I am glad for you."

He nodded. "Well," he said, slowly, "I don't know's I ought to brag about it. Maybe I shouldn't take too much credit. I have known Eph better than most folks. At that time I knew more of his feelin's—and about, well, about some of his private affairs. I knew some things that even he didn't know I knew—and he doesn't know yet, so far as that goes. . . . But there, Mrs. Powell! What did we get to rakin' all this over for? Let's talk about the weather, that's fair to middlin' pleasant."

She did not speak. He laughed and went on. "Otis Crocker," he said, "lived up on the Dock Road in the old days, and he used to have a habit of spendin' consider'ble time in the back room of Simmons's billiard saloon. Sometimes he'd come home from there pretty late and pretty well lit up, as the boys say. Sort of high-priced copy of Henry Payson, he was. His wife would be waitin' for him, and she'd start in to tell him exactly the kind of critter he was. She could do it, too—yes, she could. 'Twas a sort of gift she had. She could call him names for an hour steady and never use a duplicate. He'd just sit there —Otis would—and listen till she ran down. Then he'd sort of heave a sigh and say, 'Well, Hannah, let's change the subject.' . . . Seems to me it's about time we changed the subject, don't you think so?"

She was looking at him intently.

"Captain Bearse," she asked, "I don't think I understand what you meant by Doctor Nye's private affairs? What sort of private affairs? His home life, did you mean?"

Captain Mark seemed uneasy. "Oh—er—nothin' 'special, I guess," he said. "Nothin' that—hello!" with an exclamation of relief, "here's Matilda. She'll change the subject for us, I bet you."

Mrs. Hopkins entered the house in a triumphant mood. Her greeting of the visitor was cordial, but rather perfunctory. Plainly it was her brother she wanted to see just then.

"There, Mark Bearse!" she exclaimed, as she removed her hat and coat. "There now! Your old car is out in the garage again, just as good as it ever was, not a scratch on it."

"How about yourself?" inquired the captain, with an elaborate assumption of anxiety. "Any scratches on you? To tell you the truth, Matilda, I was almost as anxious about you as I was about the auto. Seems strange, I know, but it's a fact. Must be because I had some insurance on the car," he added, with a wink in Katherine's direction.

His sister did not deign to notice this bit of frivolity. She turned to their caller.

"He is always so afraid to let me handle that car by myself," she declared. "Seems to think I ain't smart enough to run it unless he's alongside to say, 'Do this' and 'Don't do that.' And, half the time, when he gets excited, he forgets he isn't on board ship and starts in orderin' me to 'Starboard half a point' or 'Head her nor-nor-east' or somethin' like that. Then I have to stop and ask him what he means. Well, this time, old fellow, I did my own or-

derin', and pilotin', too, and *I* didn't run over anybody's Plymouth Rock rooster."

"Did he?" asked Katherine.

"Indeed he did! Captain Zebulon Snow's pet rooster it was. He ran over it right in the middle of the main road, with nothin' else in sight. If *I* had done such a thing—my sakes alive!—I never would have heard the last of it from him. But, bein' as he did it himself, it was just one of those accidents that are bound to happen."

Her brother rubbed his chin. "The main fault she finds with me," he observed, "is because I did it where Cap'n Zeb could see me. 'Twas her birthday—the seventy-ninth, if I recollect right—and she'd said to me before I left the house, 'I do wish I'd thought to have chicken for dinner to-day. 'Twould taste so good,' she says. Well, of course, that was on my mind and when that old scraggly Plymouth Rock come hoppin' across my bows, says I to myself, 'Here is Matilda's dinner!' I did it all for the best, but Cap'n Zeb got the chicken and I've been gettin'—well, what the Universalists don't believe in, ever since."

Matilda sniffed. "Of course you know better than to pay any attention to *that* rigamarole, Mrs. Powell," she said. "And, Mark Bearse, if you dare to add twenty-odd years to my age again I'll—I'll—I don't know what I'll do to you. I am a few years older than he is, as a matter of fact. Of course that's antique enough, but it isn't seventy-nine—by as much as three feet and a fish line. . . . Were you waitin' to see me, Mrs. Powell?"

When told of Katherine's errand Mrs. Hopkins thought it over and then admitted that she presumed likely she could spend the next few days at the Dillingham house, if her presence there would help Faith.

"I can go now as well as a week from now," she added. "I've only just begun to clear up after leavin' him here alone before and the dirt and rubbish he can stir up in another six or eight days won't show much on top of the first layer. I'll come, Mrs. Powell; this evenin' if I can—to-morrow mornin', anyhow."

Captain Mark offered a suggestion. "Better go to-night, Matilda," he urged. "Then, if I want to go clammin' this afternoon, I can leave my rubber boots in the parlor and sleep easy."

Doctor Nye was out when Katherine returned to the Dillingham house. Faith was in the sitting room, reading aloud to Tom. Katherine did not interrupt them. She did not feel equal to the strain of further conversation just then. Her fixed determination to leave that house—and Ostable—had carried her through the call at the Bearse home, but now the reaction had come and she wanted to be alone again. She must plan a little. There were business matters to be attended to; they were not urgent but they would serve as an excuse for going away. Faith, nor Tom, nor any one else, must catch a hint of the real reason. Ephraim might perhaps surmise her motive, but she would never admit it, even to him. If she were more brave, or strong-minded, she might have stayed on a little longer and pretended—but she had never been convincing in make-believe.

Yet already her feelings had changed a bit. Her resentment against Fanny Copeland had abated. She was no longer so bitterly jealous of the dead woman. Her husband had loved her. There was nothing strange in this—nothing unheard of or beyond credulity. She—Katherine—had deceived herself, that was all. She had married

without a great love, but he had not. His love had been great indeed. It had been faithful unto death—and beyond.

She was the one who had not been faithful. Even Mark Bearse had scornfully refused to dream of Ephraim Nye's guilt. After all her thinking it was her own sense of unworthiness which remained, that and the revelation of his love and the sacrifice he had made because of it.

Faith came hurrying up the stairs. Her eyes were shining.

"Oh, Mrs. Powell!" she cried. "I didn't hear you come in. Henry told me you were here. I—I have something to tell you. . . . But what is it? What is the matter? Are you sick?"

"No. No, Faith. I have a—a headache, that is all."

It was a well-worn excuse, but it served. Faith was too greatly excited to be suspicious. "What is it you have to tell me?" asked Katherine.

"It is about father. I don't know what it means. Perhaps—perhaps it doesn't mean anything, but—oh, I am sure it does! Uncle Eph said—he said——"

"Yes, Faith."

"He told me this morning that—well, it doesn't sound like anything important at all. It was more the way he said it, I think. And you know he doesn't say things without a reason, does he?"

"No. What did he say?"

"He said—he said for me not to be discouraged about father's attitude toward Tom. It was going to change, he felt sure of it, and everything would end just as we wanted it. I asked him why he was sure, and if anything had happened to make him feel that way. He wouldn't say, but

he told me to stop worrying. Father was not going to die, he said, and everything was going to be all right. Now *what* did he mean?"

Katherine could have told her what he meant, but she did not, of course. Beyond assuring her that she shared the doctor's belief in the ultimate all-rightness and that Faith must be hopeful and dismiss her worry, she said little on that subject. She did, however, speak of her intention of going away.

"I have heard—I received some news to-day which makes it seem best for me to go," she said. "I am sorry to leave you and Tom, of course, but I have arranged for Mrs. Hopkins to come in my place. Tom is so much better that he will be able to go home in another week, I think. And perhaps before that time your father will have changed his mind. . . . Oh, I know you can't believe that, but Doctor Nye must have meant something. He must have had some reason for speaking so confidently. Trust him, Faith."

"I do. . . . I always do. And I know Tom trusts him absolutely. He is so—so straightforward and honest and sincere. Mrs. Powell, doesn't it seem amazing to you, now that we have come to know him so well—doesn't it seem—oh, impossible that he could have done the thing people say he did? Of course, he did do it, but . . . What is it? Oh, your head, of course! I'm so sorry. I have been selfish. I mustn't trouble you any more now. And I am awfully sorry you are going away. I shall see you again before you leave and you must tell me all about it, where you are going and when you are coming back. You will be back soon, won't you? We can't, any of us, do without you."

Katherine did not come down to dinner. She heard Nye's voice and was fearful that he might come up to prescribe for her headache. She wanted to see him, she must see him and tell him of her discovery, but she could not do it yet. Later in the afternoon, when they were alone and she had mustered courage for the ordeal, she would watch for an opportunity.

He did not come up. Faith had expressed the opinion that Mrs. Powell was asleep and so he did not disturb her.

The opportunity came about five o'clock. The doctor was alone when she came down to the dining room. Faith was with Tom, Margaret was in the kitchen, Henry was in the barn cleaning the automobile. Ephraim was sitting by his favorite north window, a book in his lap. He had done little reading during the months past, he had been far too busy for that. He was not reading now. He was looking out of the window. The prospect upon which he looked was as forbidding as it always was. She, catching a glimpse of it over his shoulder, thought it almost as bleak and brown as her future.

He turned and saw her standing there. Their eyes met. He rose.

"What is it?" he asked hurriedly. "Your head——"

She interrupted. "No," she said quickly. "I am well—physically. Please don't ask—or speak to me now. I have something to say to you first, and—and I must say it while we are alone."

He did speak, however. He had been thinking and he spoke his thought.

"You are going away," he said. "Faith told me. Where are you going?"

She shook her head. "I don't know exactly. I shall

go to Boston first. Then—oh, but that doesn't matter. That isn't what I want to say to you."

"But why are you going?"

"I have business—some affairs which need attention. But that doesn't matter, either. . . . Ephraim, I *know.*"

He looked at her. He was grave and there were lines between his brows and about his mouth. As he looked those lines deepened.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"I mean I know—everything. Judge Copeland told me."

He was silent for an instant. Then——

"What did he tell you?" he demanded.

"Everything—the whole story. I went to him this morning, hoping to induce him not to insist on Faith's going away with him. I found him dreadfully shaken. He said he was almost crazy; he looked it. He told me of your coming there last night. Then he told me all that you had told him. He told me the truth about—about the church money—and your wife."

Doctor Nye caught his breath sharply.

"No!" he cried. "Good heavens! He *must* be crazy."

"He was not—not really. He told me what you told him."

"Oh! . . . And he promised me. . . . Did you believe it?"

"Ephraim!" reproachfully. "Of course I believed it. Why—I knew it was true. The horrible part of it is that I ever believed you were—were——"

"Hush! . . . I told him never to tell a soul. He promised——"

"He had to tell. Of course he did. And I don't think

he really meant to tell, either. He had been there, in that room, all night, thinking of nothing else. When I came, and mentioned your name, he told me. He could not help it. Don't blame him too much, Ephraim. He is suffering dreadfully."

"Blame him! I could kill him."

"No, he isn't to blame. You see, the thought of what you did for—for her—his sister, and of how he had treated you—things he had said and done—it was the realization of all this which forced him to tell me. . . . Oh, I know—I know! I have been thinking the same thoughts myself. They are dreadful. You must forgive him, Ephraim, if you can. . . . There are others you can never forgive."

He said nothing. He was not looking at her now, but at the wall beyond. And there was no hint of forgiveness for Daniel Copeland in his expression.

"You will forgive him, Ephraim," she went on. "You will, by and by, after you have had time to realize what he is suffering. I know it, I say, because I have been suffering, too. . . . But I am not asking you to forgive me. Oh, no!"

He answered without looking at her.

"Forgive you?" he repeated. "For what?"

"For what? You know. For ever permitting myself to dream that you were anything but what I know you to be, the most honorable man that ever lived. I don't offer any excuses, there aren't any. They told me you had taken that money and I wouldn't believe. When the letters came still I wouldn't believe. Then, when I read in the papers they sent—when I read the accounts of the trial,

that you did not deny, that you admitted the check was yours, I—I——"

"You did believe. Of course you did. I meant for you to—you and the rest of the world. You are not to blame for that. Good heavens, no!"

"Oh, yes, I am. Knowing you, I should have remembered and never believed. But I didn't understand then, as I do now. I did not know that you were doing it for her sake. I did not, somehow, dream of that."

"Why should you? There! that is enough. Don't say any more about it. But, as for Dan Copeland——"

"He did the right thing. And he will never tell any one else, I am sure of that."

"I will take care that he doesn't."

"He won't. He said it was your secret, if you wished it to be. But it should be told. I should like to tell it from one end of Ostable to the other. They ought to know—those narrow, bigoted, self-righteous people, that the man they have——"

He broke in.

"You will tell no one," he commanded. "Katherine, do you understand? You will tell no one."

"I know. And I understand. It is for the sake of her name—your wife's honor, I know. And of course I shall not tell. Ephraim, what a wonderful love yours was. It is the thought which has been uppermost in my mind ever since Judge Copeland told me. How you must have loved your wife!"

He made no comment. His face had settled into the masklike rigidity which it had worn so habitually when he first returned to Ostable and which it had worn less frequently of late.

"I wanted to tell you this," went on Katherine. "I wanted you to know that I knew, that I understand at last, and that I am glad to understand. Not only that you were always what I should have known you to be, the very soul of honor, but that you loved your wife with a love great and wonderful enough to inspire such a sacrifice. . . . No, don't say any more to me now. I—I—you can imagine my feelings. You are what you are, and I—I am not fit to be on the same earth with you. But we have been friends, haven't we? You can never forgive me for my lost faith. I don't expect that; I shall never forgive myself. But I am proud to have been your friend. . . . Good-by, Ephraim.

He turned now and looked at her.

"You are going—now?" he asked.

"I am going home. Mrs. Hopkins will be here to-night. If she shouldn't come, and I am needed, I will come back and stay until to-morrow. But I am going to leave Ostable in a few days. It is best."

"You are going—because of this? There is no other reason? This business of yours——"

She knew what he was thinking, what he was about to say—and she interrupted.

"Oh, yes, I have business in the city; I really have," she declared. "I am not going away because of this, not entirely. And I shall come back, of course—later on. But just now—oh, Ephraim, can't you understand? I must go for a little while. I can't stay here. I feel—you must know how I feel. I am going. It is best."

He turned and stood, for a moment, looking out of the window. Then he spoke. "Yes," he said, slowly, "perhaps it is. I have told you many times that you should

never have come to this house. As for forgiveness from me to you, that is absurd. You believed exactly what I intended every one to believe. As for friendship—well, I appreciate yours; be sure of that. Probably we shall see each other again before you leave town."

"Perhaps. And I shall keep your secret, even though I think it ought to be published abroad. You may depend upon me."

He smiled, faintly. "I have depended upon you for much," he said.

CHAPTER XXIV

KATHERINE walked home alone. She had intended telephoning for her car, but she did not do it. The darkness of the early winter evening had set in and the weather was chill and disagreeable, but she did not mind. The bitter loneliness of it fitted her mood. The brisk exercise was a help and the push against the cutting wind a temporary distraction. She walked rapidly, hoping to meet no one. Her hope was realized. It was supper time and North Ostable's ways were deserted.

It was not until she was within a half mile of her destination that she heard the roar of a heavy car on the road behind. Its lights illumined the way and threw her shadow far ahead. The car overtook her, then drew to a standstill. It was the Copeland limousine and the Copeland chauffeur opened its door and spoke.

"Mrs. Powell," he said.

"Yes," she answered.

"I have been down to the Dillingham place looking for you. They told me you had gone home. Won't you get in and let me take you the rest of the way?"

"No, thank you. I am enjoying the walk. . . . But why were you looking for me?"

"The Judge sent you a note. Here it is."

She took the envelope mechanically. What could Judge Copeland wish to see her about—now? Certainly she did not wish to see him, nor any one else.

"Is there an answer?" she asked.

"Yes'm, I guess the Judge expected one."

By the blaze of the car's headlight she read the note. It was brief and the hand which had written it was unsteady. The writing was a pathetic caricature of Daniel Copeland's usual dignified and precise chirography. He wished to see her for a few moments and preferred to do so alone.

"It is a private matter," he wrote, "and, for your sake as well as mine, I think no one except ourselves should know of it. Could you make it convenient to come to my house about eight-thirty this evening? If so I shall be glad to send my car and driver. I shall not keep you long. Please don't speak of your coming to any one."

She read this puzzling communication through.

"Tell Judge Copeland that I expect to be at my own house this evening," she said. "I shall be glad to see him there, or, if he prefers and will send word by you, I will call on him."

The chauffeur nodded, said good night and the limousine rolled away. Katherine continued her walk, the Copeland note crushed in her glove. For the time being this new riddle displaced the thoughts which had been hers, and was therefore welcome. She tried to imagine what the "private matter" might be, a matter which, for her sake as well as the Judge's, was so great a secret that no one must know of their interview.

For her sake! Why for hers? She could think of nothing which she and Judge Copeland had in common—nothing except Faith's love affair and the knowledge of Doctor Nye's sacrifice. Perhaps—it was possible—that Copeland had repented of having told her the story of his

sister's guilt, and wished to plead again for her silence concerning it. That might be. . . . But what did he mean by "For your sake as well as mine"?

The cook, Margaret Brady, was still at the Nye house, but the other servants had remained at the Powell cottage during their mistress's absence. Her evening meal was ready when she arrived, but she ate little of it. By this time the mystery of the Copeland note was almost forgotten. She tried to center her thoughts upon other things, upon the packing which must be done, upon plans for the closing of the house, upon a program for the future. It was useless. She could think only of Ephraim Nye, his love, his sacrifice, and her own awakening and humiliation. What she should do, where she should go—these questions did not interest her. She did not care.

It was only a few minutes after eight when the maid announced Judge Copeland. He came into the library and, at her invitation, sat wearily down. His wretchedness caused her to forget her own, for the moment.

"Are you feeling worse?" she asked, quickly.

He shook his head. "No," he said. "No worse. I am very tired and my nerves are no better after this last shock. I am going away soon. I suppose I must. I haven't given myself or my plans much thought as yet. . . . Mrs. Powell, since your call—since I told you of—told you what Doctor Nye told me, I have had another—well, revelation. It was that which I came to speak to you about. I called it a private matter. It is, very private, and very personal —to me, and, I think, to you."

He stopped, and from his pocketbook took an envelope, bearing a name. She was silent, waiting. He went on.

"In our talk—it seems a year ago, but of course it was

only this morning—you mentioned—I think you mentioned having known Ephraim Nye in Boston, before your marriage, when he was at the hospital there. You said that, didn't you?"

She nodded. "Yes," she said.

"Your name then was Katherine Minot, wasn't it?"

"Yes. . . . But I don't remember telling you that."

"Perhaps not. I am not sure. But it was Katherine Minot? . . . Yes. . . . Mrs. Powell, when Doctor Nye was at my house last night he left this letter. It is a letter to me from his wife—my sister."

He told, briefly, of Nye's finding the letter in his wife's desk after her death, of his leaving it for thirteen years in charge of a friend, of his final delivery of it into his—Copeland's—hands.

"A part of the letter," he continued, "is—is—well, no one must see it but myself. It is—perhaps you can imagine what it is. She thought—she expected to die, and she wrote me the whole truth. She was weak and sick and in terrible trouble and she told me everything. She and I were very dear to each other, perhaps even more so than most brothers and sisters, and so. . . . Excuse me, I can't talk about that."

She turned away, as much to hide her own emotion as to avoid seeing his. After an interval he went on.

"That part of her letter is for me only. But there is another part that concerns you."

"Concerns me?"

"Yes. And I have reached the conclusion that you should see it. I don't know, of course—I am not presuming to—I. . . . But, I feel as if you should see it. Here

it is. . . . No, don't read it until I have gone. After you have read it I should like you to return it to me. You have my permission to show it to one other person, if you think best. If you don't, I probably shall, for she wished me to. . . . I think that is all, Mrs. Powell. Good night."

"But, Judge Copeland, I can't see—I don't know what you mean."

"Perhaps you will understand when you read it. Good night."

She accompanied him to the door, but neither spoke again. She came back to the library. The envelope lay upon the table where he had left it. It contained a number of closely written sheets of note paper. She sat down, and began to read.

She read on to the end, not to the end of the letter itself —that the Judge had not left with her—but to the foot of the last page. Then she leaned back in her chair, the sheets of paper in her lap, and sat very still. After a time she took them up and reread them, slowly and carefully. At the end of this second reading she could not have told all she had read, her brain seemed to be incapable of comprehending clearly just then, but certain paragraphs stood out in her memory.

These were some of them:

I love him dearly, but he doesn't really love me. I have always known it, although he does not know I know and would feel dreadfully if he thought I did. No husband could have been kinder or more faithful or devoted than he has been. He is wonderfully good to me, so very much better than I deserve, but it is because he thinks it his duty, not because he really loves me. He loves that other woman,

Katherine Minot her name was when he knew her. She married a man named Powell afterward.

. . . . . .

I knew he loved her when we first met there at the hospital. They were engaged, I am sure, although it was not announced and he has never said so. I made up my mind she shouldn't have him and that I would. I planned for that. I made her think he and I had always been very fond of each other. I wrote her a letter and told her so. I told her a lot of things, lies they were, but I didn't care. I meant to have him and that she shouldn't. I am sorry now, but I guess I should do it all over again if I were going to live and she came between us. But I am going to kill myself rather than go to prison, and I want him to know. And if he still wants her and she wants him I shan't be in the way. I can't bear to think of any one else having him, but I do want him to be happy. I owe him that, and ever and ever so much more. This isn't the first time I have taken things, and he has forgiven me and paid for them, and gone on being good to me.

. . . . . .

But he doesn't love me and he does love her even yet. I know it. Once, when he was away, I was going through that old-fashioned desk he used and I found a secret drawer. He had never told me it was there. And in it were a lot of her letters to him and her photograph. I wanted to burn them but I was afraid to. It was just after one of those times when I had been in trouble, the same kind as this but not as hopeless, and he had paid the bill even though it took everything he had saved. I was afraid if he found I had burned the letters and the photograph he would stop pretending and tell me what he really thought of me. So I said nothing and we both went on pretending.

It is no use pretending now, for I am going to die and get away from it all. But I want him to know. And, if it were possible, I should want her to know, too. Then they might marry, if they wanted to, I suppose. Of course they can't, for she is married to that Powell man. Perhaps she could get a divorce, though that is ridiculous to think of. I am saying a lot of silly things, but I am almost crazy and when you read this I shall be dead.

. . . . . .

But I want him to know and, if it is possible, I want her to know. He doesn't love me and he never has loved me. He loves her and always will. I don't deserve his love, for I lied and schemed to get him from her and I am a thief and a wicked woman. Now perhaps she will have him, after all. No, she won't, because she is married already. I am glad of that, too. But I want you to know all about it, Dan, and I want them to know. *I want you to tell them.*

. . . . . .

Perhaps it is because I have spoiled his life and know that he must *hate* me, although he is always good to me, and never hints at such a feeling—perhaps that has helped to make me wicked and careless. I wish I could think that, but I am afraid it isn't true. I always was reckless and wanted things and didn't care very much how I got them. Well, I wanted him and I got him. He married me because she had thrown him over and he was reckless, himself, just then. I practically made him marry me. Yes, I did. This is the *truth.*

. . . . . .

But he loves her still and he has never, *never* loved me.

. . . . . .

Katherine read the letter for the third time. It was so weak and childish and pitiable. It was like an uncompro-

mising photograph revealing frivolous, shallow, unbalanced Fanny Copeland as she was. All feelings of hatred and jealousy vanished, and pity took their place. She wept as she read. But her tears were not all sad ones, she was crying, too, from sheer happiness.

For a long time she sat there in the library, thinking. When she rose from the chair it was with a fixed determination. She knew what she should do. Her own life and his had been wrecked—yes; but not beyond salvage.

Down at the Dillingham place breakfast was over. Mrs. Hopkins had come the night before and she was now in the kitchen, helping Mrs. Brady by washing the dishes. Not that help was needed, nor even expected nor desired, but because wherever dishes were to be washed Matilda automatically took charge.

"You've got the dinner to think about," she told the cook. "Go ahead down town and do your marketin' or whatever else you want to do. I'll attend to things here. . . . Yes, I will, too. Land sakes! I've got to do somethin', and I'm precious sure I ain't wanted in the sittin' room. I stayed in there for ten minutes and neither Tom Stone nor Faith Copeland spoke a word to me except when I spoke to them. All they did was sit and look at each other. I don't know how they felt, but I know how they looked, and I came to the conclusion that two idiots in one room was enough. They don't need me. Mercy on us! I doubt if they even knew when I came out."

Doctor Nye was in the dining room, reading the Boston *Herald*. Pressure upon him had relaxed a bit and it was no longer necessary for him to rush from the house at daylight and remain away until after nightfall. He was

reading, or trying to read, and finding it hard work. Thinking, however, was an unprofitable game and he had played it until he knew he must play it no longer. His thoughts interfered with his sleep and his meals and he was sufficiently skilled in his profession to realize that brain and nerves must rest. They must. So he tried to rest them by reading the news, but he found himself arriving at the foot of a column with very slight comprehension of the lines his eyes had followed.

Henry Ward Beecher Payson entered at the side door. He had a bottle in his hand and a broad grin upon his face.

"Here's them bitters from the drug store," announced Mr. Payson. "That stuff for Tom, I mean. I frogged it up town and back just as easy as slidin' down hill, Doctor Eph. The old leg's just as good as it ever was. Them Boston folks you sent it to done a good job. Never 'd know it had been busted, hardly, you wouldn't. I wish Bluey would heave in sight, so's I could show it to him. Don't know's I won't go to meetin' Sunday so's folks can see how spry I get along on it. Don't squeak nuther, the way it used to. I wish Bluey *could* see it."

The doctor looked up. "You don't expect to find him by going to church, do you?" he inquired.

"No-o, not scurcely. I've heard tell where he is, though. I see Bill Everdean t'other day. I ain't run across him afore since the night of the water works time. He's been shovelin' sand along with the gang that's deepenin' Stone's Crick and layin' them new big pipes for the Improvement Company. Bill tells me Bluey's in what you might call a little mite of trouble. Seems he made some new kind of —of—er—temperance drink, made it out of feed corn and raisins and yeast and molasses and—er—essence of pep-

permint and bay rum and one thing or 'nother, and——"

"Temperance drink, did you call it?" broke in Nye.

"Well, I don't hardly cal'late Bluey intended it to be that, but it turned out kind of disappintin', so Bill says. Anyhow, Bluey drunk so much of it tryin' to get results, that it made him sick. He's over to the hospital at Wapatomac, and all he can take is milk. Ain't that awful? Milk! For Bluey Batchelder!"

"Was that what you were laughing about when you came in just now?"

"No. I was laughin' on account of Althy Bemis. She spotted me comin' by with that bottle of bitters and she looked at it so everlastin' suspicious that I had to stop and tell her about it. He, he! Oh, dear!"

"What did you tell her?"

"I told her she mustn't say nothin' about it to anybody, but 'twas a little drop of somethin' I was gettin' on the sly for Mr. Drew—the minister, you know. I told her Mr. Drew had been kind of disappinted with the last couple of sociables they'd had at the meetin' house—they'd been kind of dull, you understand—and 'twas his notion that if what was in that bottle was poured into the lemonade 'twould sort of liven things up, so you might say. He, he, he! That's what I told her."

"I see. Well, what did she say?"

"She said consider'ble many things. Wanted to know if I knew where folks that told such wicked, scandalous stories as that went to. I told her that if the yarn was true one of 'em would go to the next sociable. She flounced into the house then with all her feathers on end. She's a kind of comfort to me sometimes, Althy is. . . . And then there's other times when she ain't."

He put the bottle on the table and lingered a moment by the door.

"Goin' out pretty soon, Doctor Eph?" he inquired.

"Yes."

"I see. Yes, yes. Well, I'll have the car ready. Where you goin'? Up to see that new Portygee baby, that Rose bud, I presume likely, eh? Heard tell 'twas pretty puny fust along. Is it all right again?"

"Yes. Firmly grafted to the family tree now, I should say."

Henry seemed to ponder. "They didn't say nothin', none of 'em, about payin' your bill, did they?" he asked, with sarcastic emphasis.

"No."

"I thought not. 'Grafted to the family tree.' Huh! I guess 'grafted' is the right word. Well, I'll be out to the barn, Doctor Eph. Sing out when you want me."

He departed. The doctor, left alone, relighted his pipe and, finding further perusal of the paper unalluring, gazed absently through the narrow, wavy-glassed panes of the north window.

The outer door again opened. Nye spoke without turning.

"I am coming, Henry," he said. "I will be out in a moment."

The voice which replied was not Henry's. The sound of it caused him to swing about and rise from his chair.

"Why—Mrs. Powell!" he exclaimed. And then, as he saw her face, he added, quickly. "Katherine, what is it? Why have you come back?"

She closed the door carefully behind her. Then she glanced at the other doors of the room.

"I came to see you, Ephraim," she said, in a low tone. "I want to speak with you alone. May I?"

He nodded. "Yes," he said. "No one will interrupt us here, I think. Mrs. Hopkins is busy in the kitchen and Faith is with Tom. But what is wrong? Why have you come back?"

She smiled. She was a little pale and her eyes looked as if she had slept but little. But her smile was bright.

"Nothing is wrong," she replied. "That is why I have come back—because I hope everything is to be right at last. Ephraim, I want to talk seriously with you. Very seriously and very frankly—and, I think, very sensibly. Will you be just as frank and sensible in your part of our talk?"

He did not answer on the instant. He was studying her expression, the light in her eyes and the odd quiver at the corners of her lips. She seemed excited, and a little fearful, and yet very determined.

"Will you?" she repeated.

"Ye-es. I will try to be. But——"

"Wait. It isn't your turn to speak. You must hear me now. First, Ephraim, I am going to hurt you. I am."

He shrugged. "You sound like the dentist," he observed.

She was too much in earnest to heed the pleasantry.

"Ephraim," she went on, "last evening after I reached home, I had another call from Judge Copeland. He brought me a letter—or part of a letter—which he wished me to read. He said you had left it with him the night before. It is the letter you kept hidden so long, the one your wife wrote to him just before she died."

He could scarcely believe it. "He brought that letter to *you!*" he exclaimed.

"Yes. Not the whole, but a part of it. The part which concerned me. He felt that I should read it. He——"

"Wait! You say—the part which concerned you? Why should her letter concern you?"

"It did. It concerned me deeply. It concerns both of us. He told me I might show it to you, if I thought best. Here it is. When you read it you will understand what I mean."

She handed him the envelope bearing Judge Copeland's name. He opened it. She rose and walked hurriedly to the window looking upon the yard. She heard the sheets of paper rustle as he read them, one after the other. It was a long time—or it seemed very long to her—before he spoke.

"Well," he said, at last.

She came back to her chair by the table. He was sitting there, the letter in his hand. He, too, was pale now, but his face was calm and expressionless. Her own eyes were wet and her voice shook as she leaned toward him and began the plea she had come there to make.

"You have read it?" she asked. "All of it?"

He nodded.

"Then you understand why Judge Copeland wished me to read it. You see why it concerns me. When I read it I—I can't tell you what my feelings were. Perhaps you can imagine them. At first I cried. It was so pitiful. I was so sorry for her. Then I began to think of myself—and I was very happy."

He did not speak. She went on.

"When I first heard—when the Judge told me of what

she did, and of what you did, I—I was miserable. I was glad to know it, of course. Wonderfully glad, and happy for you. But I was wretched when I thought of my own weakness and lack of faith. I told you that yesterday. But the thing which made me most wretched I did not tell you. That was the conviction which came with it, the thought that you had sacrificed your name and honor and future because of your great love for her. You see . . . you see, it made it plain—or I thought it did—that you must always have loved her and never really loved me at all. And now I know. . . . Ephraim, is what she has written true? Is it?"

He was silent.

"Is it?" she repeated. "I must know. I have a right to know. You must answer me."

He frowned. And when he answered he did not meet her look.

"It makes no difference, that part of it," he said. "Copeland should never have shown you the letter. I shall have some things to say to him when we meet."

"No. And he did right. You know he did. It was my letter, as well as his, and yours. She asked him to tell me. She understood. And it does make a difference, all the difference on earth. You must tell me whether or not what she says is true? *Have* you always loved me and no one else? . . . I ask it because—because I have always loved you. And no one else—really—at all."

She could not see his face, he kept it turned from her. She waited. Then he heard her sob.

He looked at her now, and, reaching across the table, laid his hand on hers. "Don't, Katherine," he begged.

"For both our sakes—don't. I wish all this had not happened. Oh, I don't mean that I wish you had not said—what you did say just then. I—I am glad and proud—and—all that. It seems quite unbelievable that you should still care for a fellow like me——"

"Care! I have always cared. Always!"

"Yes, I know you wouldn't say it if it weren't true. But that doesn't make it less unbelievable. . . . And, if it is a satisfaction to you—although it seems as if you could need no assurance from me—I will say yes to your question. What this letter says is true enough. . . . Indeed it is!"

"Oh! And all those years you had not forgotten——?"

"Forgotten! . . . But there, my dear, what difference does it make? Our lives—mine, at any rate—are ruined."

"No, they are not."

"Mine is. You have yours left—or the larger part of it and there is no reason why you should not be happy. But I must go on as I am. No one, except you and Dan, will ever know the true story. That is absolutely settled. I shall insist on Copeland's burning this letter. I shall continue my fight here in Ostable. Nothing can be changed. Nothing is changed, except that you and I know the truth concerning—everything—and each other. That will be a great comfort to me—and—yes, I suppose to you. But that is all. All!"

She shook her head.

"No," she cried, "it is not all. Ephraim, you and I made up our minds when we discussed Faith and Tom that their love story should not be spoiled. We said—I heard you say—that it should not be. Nothing else

mattered beside their happiness, you said. But what about our own love story? Should that be wrecked?"

"It is wrecked already, wrecked long ago."

"It isn't. You are not old. Neither am I. We have—you just said so—the greater part of our lives to live. Why shouldn't we live them together?"

He gazed at her. Then he sighed.

"Katherine," he said, "I think I must be. . . . Do I understand that you——"

"I am proposing marriage," she broke in. Then, with a faint smile, she added, "Oh yes, I am aware that it is unusual, but we should grow accustomed to unusual happenings, you and I. I have been considering this for hours and hours. And I have made up my mind that I will not permit my happiness to be taken from me again. I won't. We are both sensible people. You love me—and I love you. You are going to marry me, Ephraim."

He sighed again. "Truly, Katherine," he said. "I think you must be dreaming. Have you really considered at all? Can't you see that because I care for you more than anything on earth—or elsewhere—that I must not marry you? Think for a minute. I am the town jailbird. I always shall be. I am poor. I always shall be. I mean to live my life here in this village. You are rich and your name is——"

"Wait! Then it is again a question of names—and trifles like that. You want to sacrifice yourself once more to save a woman's name. It is becoming a habit with you, Ephraim. Suppose I were poor, what then?"

"But you are not, you see."

"I could give my money away. That wouldn't be difficult, even in North Ostable. And I should be merely

taking my turn at sacrificing. But I am not going to be so foolish. And you are not going to be foolish again. I am willing—more than willing—to live here as the wife of Doctor Nye. It will make me happy—very happy indeed. Forget yourself and think of me. Don't you want me to be happy?"

"It is because I want you to be happy that I will not consider such a thing."

"Will you marry me, Ephraim?"

"No."

"You are not very polite. This is the first time I ever proposed. You won't—even though I beg you to?"

"No, Katherine."

She rose. "Then I am going to tell every one the truth," she declared. "I shall tell them the whole story. That you are not a—a thief, that you never were, that you are just a stubborn, unreasonable man who pretended to be guilty for the sake of some one else. That's what I shall tell them."

"What! You'll do nothing of the kind. . . . Katherine, where—for heaven's sake!"

He started toward her, but it was too late. She was at the door of the sitting room and she opened it.

"Faith," she called, "will you come out here a moment? I have something to tell you."

He stared at her aghast. She merely smiled. Then she crossed to the door of the kitchen and called Mrs. Hopkins. The latter entered the dining room, broom in hand. Faith was already there.

"Faith," said Katherine, calmly, "I want you and Mrs. Hopkins to hear something I have to tell. It is important —very."

Doctor Nye's face was white. He stretched a shaking hand toward her.

"Katherine," he pleaded, "if you have any regard——"

"Hush! . . . Oh, here is Henry. He can hear it, too. Faith, and Mrs. Hopkins and Henry, I am going to surprise you. Doctor Nye and I are engaged to be married. Congratulate us, please."

CHAPTER XXV

MISS ALTHEA BEMIS had grown thin. No, that statement should not be permitted to stand. It is not adequate. To those acquainted with the lady it would convey little meaning. It is like saying that the overalls worn, while at work, by Henry Ward Beecher Payson were not new. So far as that goes, they were not new when he bought them. Now, after their seventh season of wear, they were much less so. It is, you see, a question of degree. So with Miss Althea's face and figure; thin they had always been, but now they were thinner.

It was one excitement after another which had worn Miss Bemis down. North Ostable had for long borne the reputation of a hamlet where nothing happened. Beginning with the fateful day three and a half years before, when Doctor Ephraim Bassett Nye rode up to the gate of the old Dillingham place in the seat of David Cahoon's buggy, North Ostable had become the community where many things had already happened, and more might be expected.

And through it all Althea had been privileged to occupy a seat in the front row, center. Doctor Nye, the stormy petrel, had fluttered back to settle directly across the road. Faith Copeland's new car had gone to smash under her very eyes. Tom Stone had begun his courtship there. She had seen Judge Copeland stride with angry importance up the Dillingham walk and stride forth again angrier than ever. She had watched Mrs. Christo-

pher Powell's calls and visits. She had witnessed Henry Ward Beecher Payson's disgraceful homecomings.

And she had enjoyed it all. Even in the midst of the typhoid epidemic, when there was at least a chance that she, too, might contract the diesase, she had found a thrill in occupying that front seat, and in leaving it to carry reports of each day's performance to the eager ears at sewing circle, prayer meeting or post office. The curtains of her parlor windows were shabby now, and she was thinner, but she had had, and was still having, a glorious time. And the end was not yet.

So, on the morning when, so rumor said, Tom Stone—able to be up and to walk a very little—was to leave the Nye house and be taken to his father's home, Miss Bemis was early in her orchestra chair. This must not be taken as meaning that she was sitting down. She distinctly was not. Mr. Payson once scornfully observed that he cal'lated Althy must have worn a path from her kitchen to her parlor windows. This morning she had trodden that path many times. When she saw Mr. Shubal Bush saunter up Bayberry Lane and linger by her front fence, she hurriedly donned coat and hat and went out to that fence.

They exchanged good mornings. Shubal explained that he was just goin' along down street to see about a job he was thinkin' of takin' and he had stopped a minute to light his pipe. Althea countered with the excuse that she was just goin' to run over to the Beasleys' to ask the time, because her clock had stopped and she had set it by guess. She ran no farther, nor did Mr. Bush continue "down street." Instead they remained where they were and talked.

"I understand the doctor's goin' to lose his steady boarder sometime this forenoon," suggested Shubal.

"Goin' to lose one of 'em, I guess," agreed Althea.

"Humph! I presume likely the others won't stay very long after he goes. 'Tain't likely Faith'll be hangin' round, not with her beau somewheres else. Don't think she loves her Uncle Eph so much as that comes to. I guess the Judge'll have her out of *that* shanty afore the day's over. I should think he would. Has he been down to see her lately?"

"He was down last night. He looks pretty feeble and wore out, the Judge does. And no wonder. After all that dreadful disappointment about his water company, then comes this."

"They tell me the water's all right now. It ought to be, the company's spent money enough."

"Yes. But it isn't that. I guess Judge Copeland would have bore up under that, no matter what it cost. It's his daughter's takin' up wth Cyrenus Stone's son that's broke him down. Poor soul! I declare if it don't seem wicked! A fine, rich, Christian man like him havin' this piled on his head. What is it the Bible says? Somethin' about an ungrateful child bein' sharper than a snake's teeth. And it's so, too."

Mr. Bush leaned a bit more heavily upon the fence rail.

"They tell me," he said, "that Judge Copeland says he is perfectly satisfied with her marryin' Tom."

Miss Bemis sniffed. "What else can he do?" she demanded. "When you've got to take bitters you might as well make believe it's lemonade. But it's bitters for him, just the same. If I was he I'd never forgive Ephraim Nye in this world. First he drives his sister

to her grave and then he marries his daughter to a Stone. It's all that Nye man's fault, no use tellin' me it isn't."

Shubal nodded. "What makes me tired," he declared, "is the way a whole passel of folks around Ostable are standin' up for Eph Nye these days. And not just the Portygee Nest crowd and them neither. Fine folks, some of the best in town, just as good as you and I be. They make out to pretend that if it hadn't been for him the typhoid would have been ten times as bad as 'twas. Angie —my own wife—she's gone soft in the head over him, like the rest of 'em. Praises him up all the time. 'Well, he's a thief just the same as he ever was,' I says to her. 'Nothin' can change that, can it?' "

"What did she say to that?"

"She said enough. Talk, talk, talk! I have to go out doors to get away from it. Her and that Aunt Lindy Pepper of hers!"

"Hasn't Miss Pepper gone home *yet?*"

"Gone home! I swan I don't believe she'll ever go home. She's stayed at my house so long she's growed fast, like a—like a barnacle on to a clam shell. It may be all right to have sick relations that's goin' to die sometime or other and leave you money, but what if they don't die? What if they talk *you* to death first? You know what she said to me this mornin'? 'Where you goin'?' says she. 'I'm goin' down street to see about some work,' I told her. 'Don't you want to borrer my spectacles?' she says. What d'ye think of that? In a feller's own house, too!"

Miss Bemis expressed sympathy. Also she made mental note of Miss Pepper's remark in order to repeat it

at circle meeting. Her next speech had to do with another victim.

"Don't it seem strange to you," she asked, "the way Mrs. Powell hangs around over across the road there? Oh, I know it's all account of her thinkin' so much of Faith and Judge Copeland. But, all the same, it's a risky thing to do. You can't be too careful of your reputation. Folks will talk. Course *we* know why she's there, but then people remember how she's always stood up for Doctor Nye, and had him in when her hired help was sick, and—but of course that doesn't mean anything, only —well, *I* wouldn't be seen in a jailbird's house, Faith or no Faith. . . . Who is this comin'? It is Mr. Hammond, isn't it? All dressed up in new clothes, and his wife in the cemetery only four or five months. Have you heard what they're sayin' about him and that Lavinia Burgess over to Denboro? . . . Oh, good mornin', Mr. Hammond. I'm real glad to see you. You haven't been down this way for a long spell. Been too busy, I suppose?"

Frankie-George may or may not have suspected that innuendo lurked in the lady's question. At any rate he did not answer it. Instead he jerked his head in the general direction of the Dillingham place, and observed:

"Somethin' doin' over yonder this mornin', I hear tell, Althy."

"I should say there was! Mr. Bush and I was just talkin' about it."

"Have you heard about Cyrenus?" asked Hammond. "What he said when they broke the news to him that his boy was figurin' to marry Judge Copeland's daughter?"

Shubal grinned. "No, I ain't," he answered. "I'll bet 'twas lively."

"I know it must have been somethin' terrible," vowed Miss Bemis. "I'm glad *I* wasn't where I could hear it. . . . What was it, Mr. Hammond?"

Frankie-George laughed. "Course I don't know what he said when he heard it the first time," he confessed. "I don't know who told him then. Some say 'twas Doctor Eph and some say 'twas Faith herself that went up there and saw him. Don't hardly seem if that could be, does it?"

Mr. Bush said no. Althea lifted her sharp shoulders.

"I don't know," she observed. "You can expect most anything from the girls nowadays. 'Tisn't much as 'twas when I was in my 'teens. When a young man asked *me* to marry him he had to tell his father himself."

So far as North Ostable was aware, no man—old or young—had ever asked Miss Bemis's hand in marriage. Mr. Bush and Mr. Hammond were, of course, much too polite to show surprise or to comment—in the lady's presence. They merely looked at each other. Frankie-George went on with his story.

"No," he repeated, "I don't know what Cyrenus said to whoever told him first. But I know what he said to Mark Bearse, because Marietta Lamb heard him say it, and told me. Cyrenus was in the settin' room; he's up and around the house now, you know. And the settin' room door was open a little ways, so Marietta says. Cap'n Mark must have said somethin' about Tom and Faith, because Cyrenus kind of laughed. 'Well, Mark,' he says, 'what can't be cured 's got to be endured, I suppose. She's a nice girl enough, from all I hear, but I'd never have picked a Copeland, you can bet on that! There's one thing sort of comforts me, though—he, he, he!—the

Honorable Dan'l don't like it a bit better than I do. We've both got to swaller our dose, but I guess mine ain't any sourer than his.' That's what Marietta said he said, and Cap'n Mark . . . eh? Hello! here comes Cap'n Mark now."

The Bearse "coop" rolled along Bayberry Lane and, as its owner would have expressed it, "cast anchor" by the Nye gate.

"Well, well!" exclaimed Miss Bemis. "I declare if he hasn't fetched Matilda with him. Regular party, isn't it? They didn't invite the neighbors, did they? I know *one* neighbor that doesn't feel slighted on *that* account. I should say *not*!"

Meanwhile, in the house over the way, preparations for the "party" had been going on for some time. Tom, wrapped and overcoated and muffled until he looked, as Henry Payson said, "pretty nigh as fleshy as a fat man," was in the rocker in the dining room awaiting the arrival of the Copeland limousine which was to take him to his father's home. Faith and Katherine were going with him, to see him safely delivered. Then Faith was to go to her own home, and Katherine, a little later, to hers, taking Mrs. Brady with her. For a time Doctor Ephraim and Henry were again to have the old Dillingham place to themselves.

Judge Copeland was not to be one of the party accompanying his prospective son-in-law to the Stone residence. The Judge had subdued his prejudices and chastened his dignity amazingly in the fortnight just past, but they were not yet sufficiently subdued nor chastened to bring him to the point of crossing Cyrenus's threshold. He might

come to that point later on, but not yet. And, as he contemplated an extended tour abroad, there was at least a six months' interval before he could be called upon to face such a possibility. He tried to comfort himself with the thought that almost anything might happen in six months. Tom was an engineer and an engineer's work was likely to call one far afield. Judge Copeland would wish to visit his daughter, and to do that he would be obliged to visit Tom. But he was not yet obliged to visit Cyrenus, and he sincerely hoped he never would be. Needless to say Cyrenus's hope was similar and quite as devout.

Faith was not going abroad with her father. She was going to remain with him for the few weeks of his stay in Ostable. She would accompany him to Boston and see him safely aboard the steamer. And before he sailed she and Tom were to marry. There would be no elaborate wedding. Considering everything a simple and very private ceremony seemed best.

Doctor Parker was to accompany his friend and patron on the six months' tour. They were sure to be congenial companions. Parker bowed down and worshiped before the Copeland shrine, and his idol was accustomed to and expected worship. So both should be reasonably happy. The Parker practice was to be left in charge of Doctor Nye and Doctor Hayes on a sort of catch-as-catch-can basis. Those who preferred unimpeachable respectability and unsmirched personal reputation to professional skill would undoubtedly choose Hayes. If the majority preferred to take their chance with skill—well, that certainly could not be accounted Doctor Parker's fault. A very satisfactory and diplomatic arrangement.

The arrival of Captain Bearse and his sister was almost

immediately followed by that of the Copeland limousine. The time had come for the breaking up of the group which, for an eventful series of weeks, had occupied the old Dillingham house. Henry announced that the car was at the gate.

"Tell the chauffeur to drive into the yard," ordered Nye. "Well, Tom, my boy, you're off. I won't say that I'm altogether glad, for I shall miss you a lot. But I am glad you're going home safe and out of danger and fairly fit. I'll drop in this afternoon. Good luck to you."

Tom rose from the rocker and grasped the hand which his friend offered.

"And good luck to you, Doctor Nye," he said. "I can't thank you. I couldn't begin to do it as it ought to be done, so I won't try. For what you have done for me—and for Faith—not to mention dad, I—I——"

He was still weak and his voice trembled as he spoke. Nye hastened to interrupt.

"That's all right, Tom," he declared, heartily. "We're quits, I guess. You and Faith between you have done a few things for me. Just one favor I am going to ask. You won't tell a word of—of what you know concerning this lady and myself, not until we are ready to have it told? Oh, I know you won't, but I am asking the same favor of everybody here. Which means you, Mark, and Mrs. Hopkins. I am speaking professionally now. I am a little tired and I want to rest. When Ostable hears that its most respected citizeness intends marrying its most horrible example then there will be another epidemic—of heart failure this time. I am not up to taking care of so many patients. You have all kept the secret so far. Keep it a little longer, please—until I get back into condition."

Faith and Henry went out with Tom, to see him safely stowed in the car. Captain Mark and Matilda accompanied them. Katherine lingered, momentarily, at the door.

"I am coming back, you know," she said. "I have some packing to do before I go home. You will be here for a little while, Ephraim?"

He nodded. "I will wait until you come," he told her.

She went out. Faith came running back. "I haven't said my 'thank you' yet," she panted. "Shut the door, please."

The doctor closed it. "But you haven't anything to thank me for, Faith," he said. "I should thank you. You know it."

She dismissed this idea with an impatient shake of the head. Coming close to him, she stood looking up into his face.

"You will come to Boston and see us married, won't you?" she urged. "You promise?"

"How do you think your father will like it, if I do?"

"He expects you. I told him I intended making you promise to come."

"Oh, I see! Well, in that case, perhaps I may."

"May?" You must! Why!" indignantly, "neither Tom nor I would let the ceremony begin if you and Mrs. Powell weren't there. We should simply sit down on—on the church steps and wait until you came."

"Dear me! I mustn't let anything like that happen. How about Tom's father; will he be there?"

"We hope so. I don't know what he and dad will do or say when they meet, but we are hoping for the best. Mr. Stone certainly wouldn't have come to our house and father wouldn't have gone to his. Up there, in neutral territory, they may behave like good children for a little while. But goodness knows!"

She paused a moment and then went on.

"I—I am like Tom," she faltered. "I can't say what I want to say to you. Perhaps I can say it better some other time. For this isn't good-by. I shall see you every day, sha'n't I?"

"I hope so, Faith."

"Yes. And—you *do* know how I feel—how Tom and I both feel? . . . Oh, I——" she paused once more. Then she threw her arms about his neck and kissed him. "Thank you, Uncle Eph," she whispered, and ran out to the car.

The limousine turned ponderously and rolled down the rutted driveway. Captain Mark and Mrs. Hopkins reëntered the house. Henry remained in the yard.

The captain held out his hand. "Well, so long, Eph," he said. "We've got be on our way. Just stopped in to see the young folks set sail. And Mrs. Powell is goin', too. Humph! you and Henry will be left in charge of the ship again for a little while. Seem kind of lonesome, won't it?"

"It will seem strange at first. But I shall be busy—and it is possible that my friends may call occasionally."

"Yes," dryly, "I shouldn't wonder. And it won't last very long. Then you'll be movin' up to more high-toned quarters. Won't speak to common folks after you're married and got your shingle hung out in the Powell front yard, I presume likely, eh? No checker games up there, I suppose."

"Come around and see."

"Oh, I shall come, you can't get away from me. But what'll your wife say if I speak my feelin's right out in meetin', same as I'm liable to do if you beat me too easy? Can't say anything stronger than 'My glory!' up in *that*

sittin' room. No, no! Well, I'll have to practice runnin' under half steam."

"Why not practice down here for a little while? I expect to be at home this evening."

Mrs. Hopkins put in a word.

"There, Doctor Nye!" she said. "You've done it now. He's as lonesome without those checker games as the last chicken in the henyard. He'll come till you tell him to stop."

"Then he'll be coming a long while."

They left a few minutes later. Captain Mark paused at the door.

"Well, Eph," he observed, with a broad smile, "I've decided that if ever I go to work again it won't be in the prophesyin' line. As a prophet I miss on all six cylinders. When you came back here to live I was mighty glad to see you on my own account and sorry on yours. I cal'lated you was makin' a dreadful mistake. Don't look much like it now, does it?"

Doctor Ephraim shook his head. "I am not sure, Mark," he answered. "I may be about to make the biggest mistake of all. Or, if I am not, some one else may be."

The captain caught his meaning.

"Don't you believe it!" he declared, emphatically. "She isn't makin' any mistake, either. You've made good in this town, Eph Nye. Remember that talk you and I had that first night in this house. I said I knew why you'd come. Ostable had put a label on you, I said, and you'd come back to make it take that label off. You've done it. Yes, you have. You're goin' to be one of our leadin' citizens, my boy, you can't help yourself."

"Good heavens! What would Judge Copeland say to that statement?"

"I don't know what he'd say out loud, but inside him he'd say, 'Amen.' And when you marry the other leadin' citizen and move up town all hands 'll be sayin' it."

The doctor looked across the road at the group at the Bemis gate.

"Even—those?" he queried.

Captain Bearse snorted contemptuously. "To the devil with *them?*" he exclaimed. His sister seized his arm.

"My sakes alive!" she protested. "That's enough. You better come straight home and do some of that practicin' you were talkin' about. That don't sound much like half steam to *me*. Come right along."

After the Bearse car was well on its way Henry Ward Beecher Payson stumped into the house.

"Well, Doctor Eph," he observed, "here we be again, just you and me, eh?"

"Here we are, Henry."

"Yep. But we sha'n't be here long. Say, doc, are you sure that Mrs. Powell really cal'lates to have me move up to her place along with you, after you're married?"

"Perfectly sure, Henry."

"Don't seem possible, scurcely. How'll I fit in up there along with all them high-toned fixin's? And what'll I do?"

"There will be enough to do. That is a good-sized place."

"Um-hum. But what will folks say when they see me there?"

"For the matter of that, what will they say when they see me? We'll have to do our best to live up to our new jobs, Henry."

"Um-hum. You'll be all right. That's where you belong, among them kind of folks. But it's going to be some consider'ble strain on me, I tell you. Have to wear my best clothes and my Sunday leg all the time, I cal'late. And suppose Bluey comes happenin' along by with—with a little somethin' in his after pocket, what then?"

Nye smiled. "I read somewhere, I have forgotten where," he said, "that the only way to get rid of a temptation was to yield to it. You have yielded to yours pretty often, so you should be rid of it by this time."

Mr. Payson seemed skeptical.

"Huh!" he muttered. "That's all right for Shakespeare to talk, but he didn't have to live in a prohibition country. Well, I'll try hard, but I would like to be tempted just once more. Yes sir, on the day when the news comes out that you and Mrs. Chris Powell are married I'd like to have Bluey come along and tempt me—hard."

"Why?"

" 'Cause I'd like to borrow his bottle of temptation and go across and give Althy Bemis a drink. She's goin' to need it *that* day."

Left alone in the dining room, Doctor Ephraim took a book from the shelf and sat down in his favorite rocker by the north window. There were calls which should be made, but he had promised Katherine to await her return. The house was oddly quiet and the volume he had selected very dull. The strangeness of his own life so far and its still stranger and more unbelievable future made the imaginings of fiction seem tame enough. After a little he dropped the book in his lap and sat gazing out of the window, as he had gazed from it so many times before.

Then he heard the door open and her step upon the threshold. He turned and spoke her name. She came to him and put her hands upon his shoulders.

"Still looking out of this miserable window," she said, reproachfully. "It is the dreariest outlook in the house, yet you always choose it. Why?"

"I don't know. Habit, I suppose. There is nothing out there to disturb thought. This is a good place to sit and think, and I have been thinking."

"As usual."

"Yes. . . . Katherine, are you quite sure that you want to be the jailbird's wife?"

"Ephraim, don't. How many times have you asked me that?"

"Well, it comes over me every few minutes that that is what you are going to be. My secret must always be a secret, and it seems wicked to have you take my name and all that goes with it. You shouldn't, you know you shouldn't."

She stooped and pressed her cheek against his hair.

"Ephraim," she said, "that scene out there looks cold and cruel, doesn't it?"

"It surely does."

"Yes. It is bleak and barren and hopeless enough. That is your life—so far. But do you see that little spot down in the corner of the ell? There is a tiny, tiny patch of green—just a dot. Do you see it?"

"Ye-es, perhaps I do."

"Well, dearest, that means that spring—our spring—is almost here, at last."

THE END

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